evergreen [1]

story
YUYUKO TAKEMIYA

art
AKIRA CASKABE

evergreen [1]

Story: Yuyuko Takemiya
Art: Akira Caskabe

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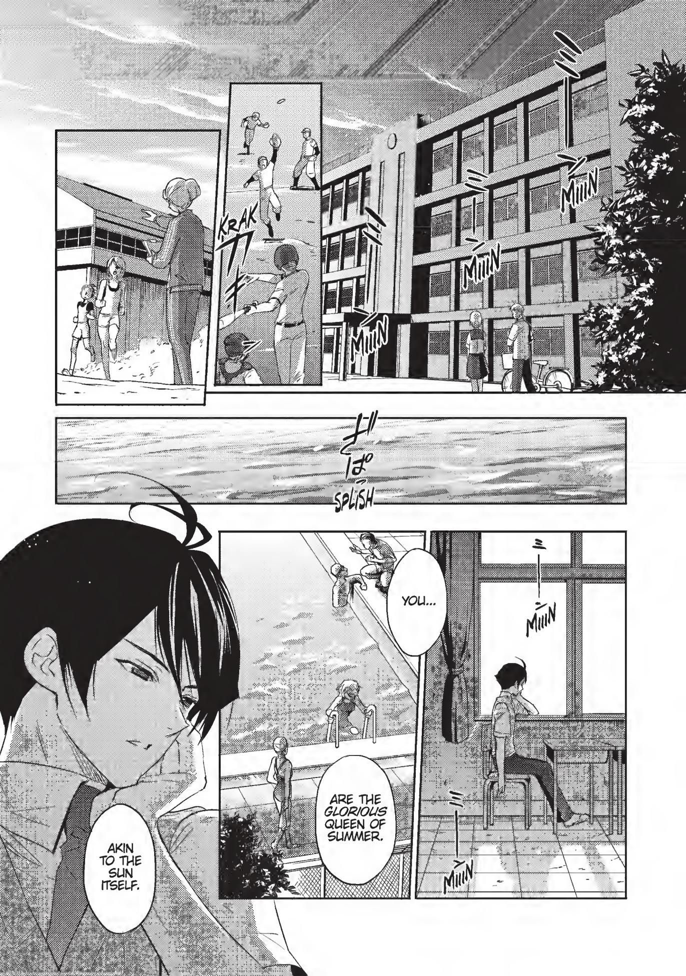
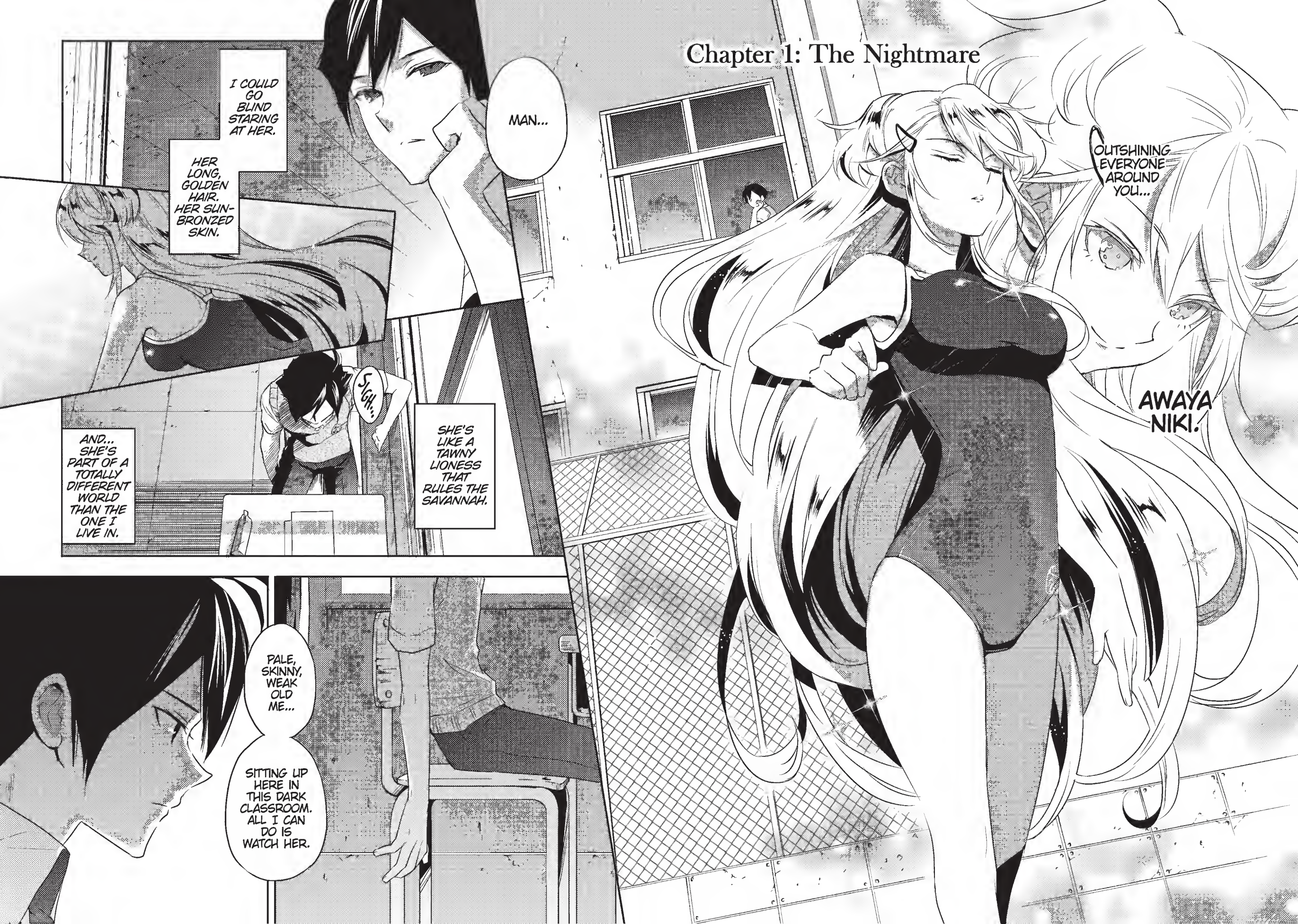
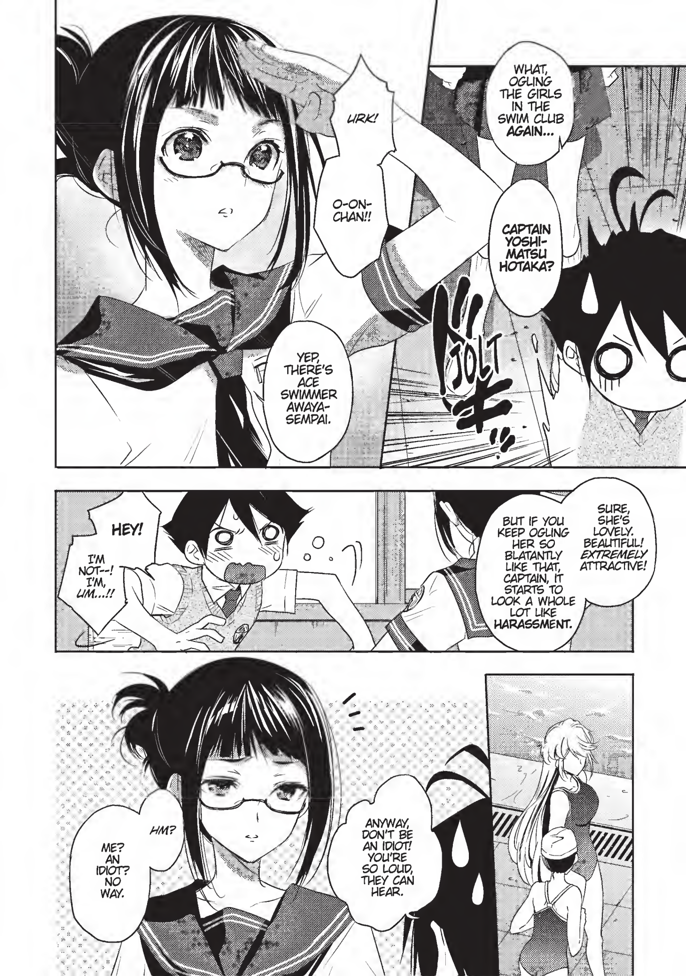
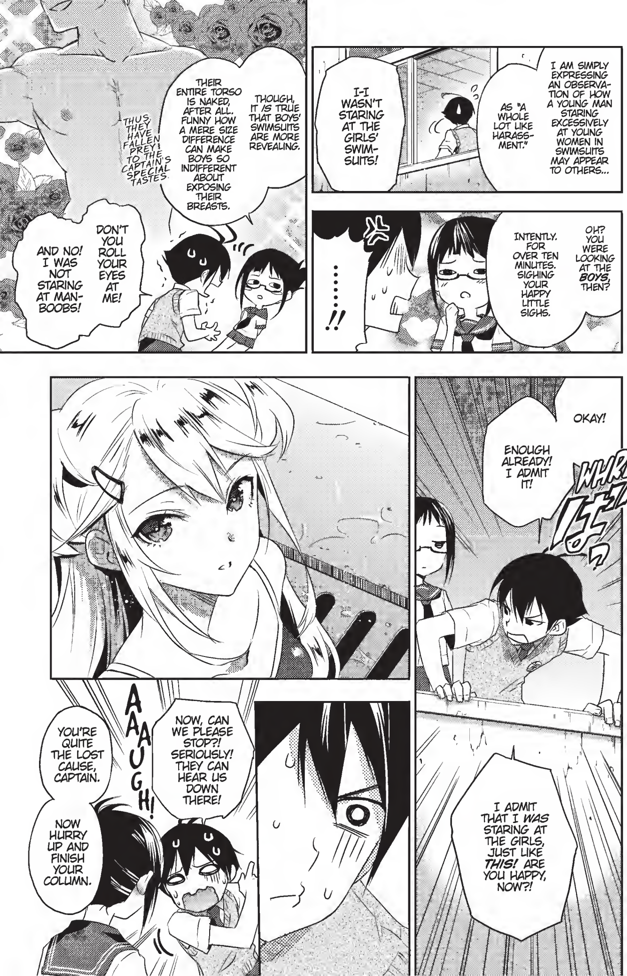
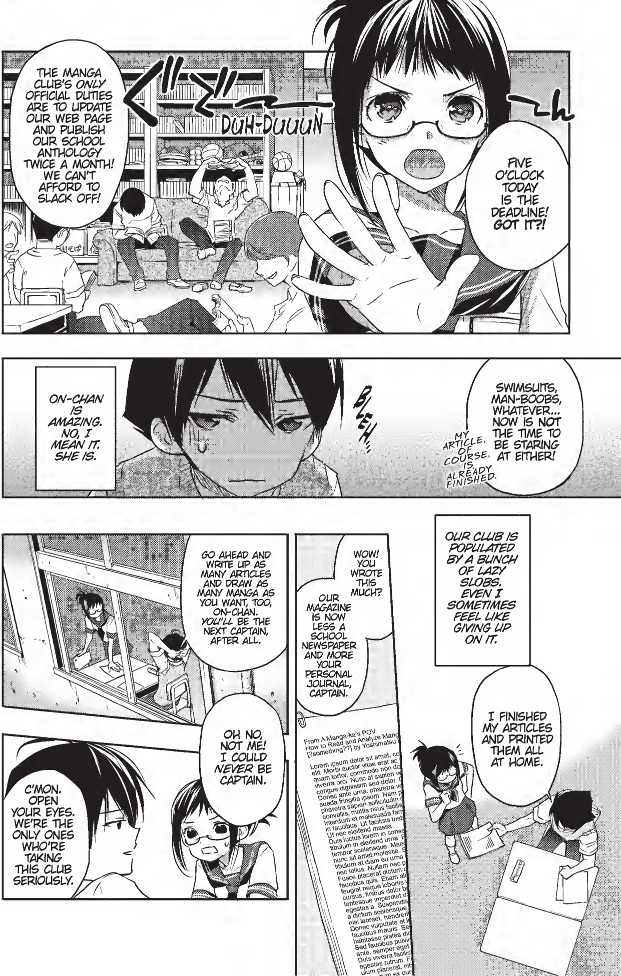

MIIIN
MIIIN
MIIIN
KRAK
SPLISH
MIIIN
MIIIN
YOU...
ARE THE *GLORIOUS* QUEEN OF SUMMER.
AKIN TO THE SUN ITSELF.

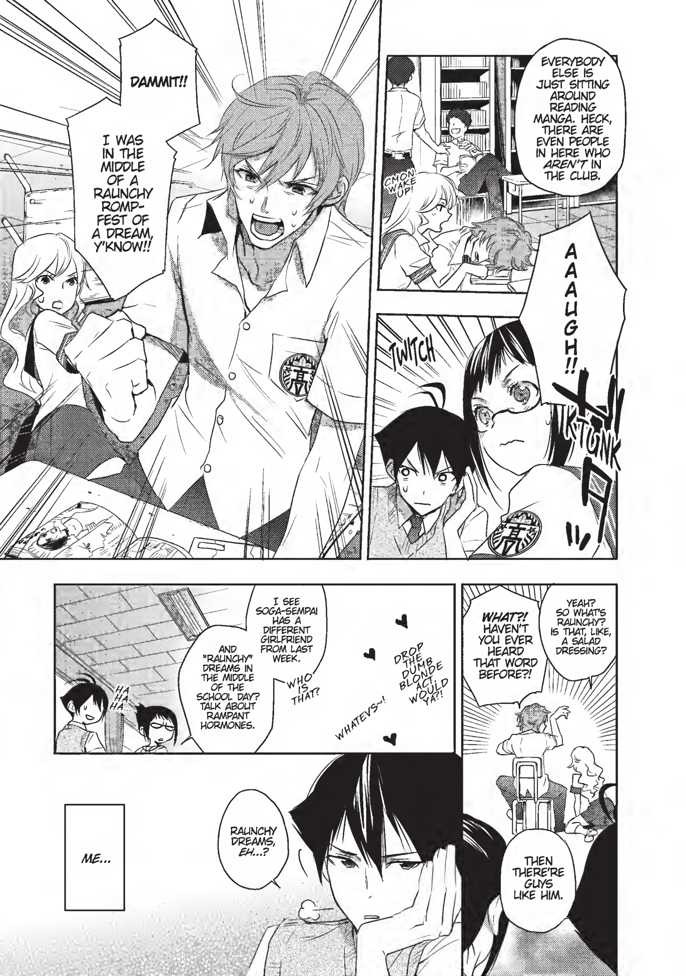
Chapter 1: The Nightmare

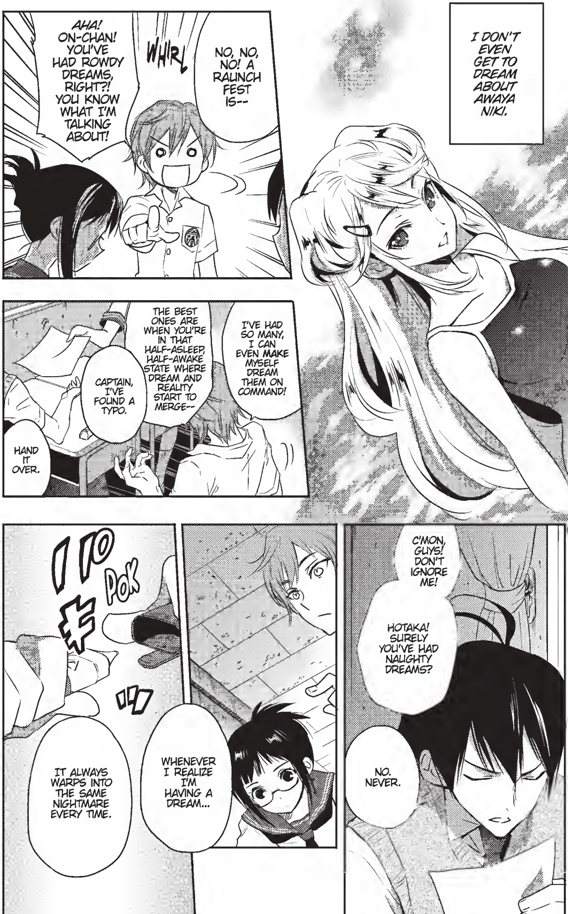

OUTSHINING EVERYONE AROUND YOU...
AWAYA NIKI.
MAN...
I COULD GO BLIND STARING AT HER.
HER LONG, GOLDEN HAIR. HER SUN-BRONZED SKIN.
SIGH...
SHE'S LIKE A TAWNY LIONESS THAT RULES THE SAVANNAH.
AND... SHE'S PART OF A TOTALLY DIFFERENT WORLD THAN THE ONE I LIVE IN.
PALE, SKINNY, WEAK OLD ME...
SITTING UP HERE IN THIS DARK CLASSROOM. ALL I CAN DO IS WATCH HER.

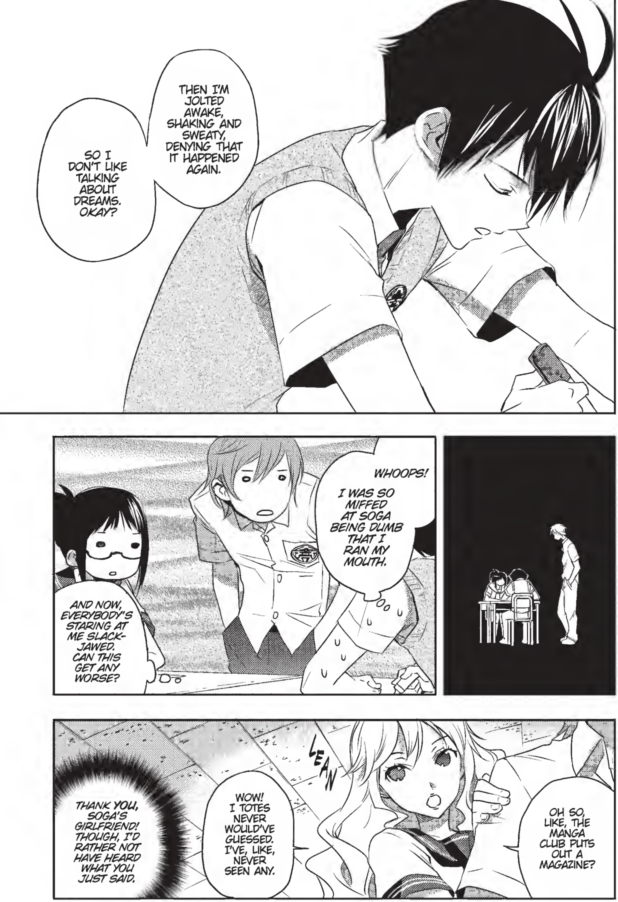

WHAT, OGLING THE GIRLS IN THE SWIM CLUB AGAIN...
CAPTAIN YOSHIMATSU HOTAKA?
JOLT
URK!
O-ON-CHAN!!
YEP, THERE'S ACE SWIMMER AWAYA-SEMPAI.
SURE, SHE'S LOVELY. BEAUTIFUL! *EXTREMELY* ATTRACTIVE!
BUT IF YOU KEEP OGLING HER SO BLATANTLY LIKE THAT, CAPTAIN, IT STARTS TO LOOK A WHOLE LOT LIKE HARASSMENT.
HEY!
I'M NOT--! I'M, *UM*...!!
ANYWAY, DON'T BE AN IDIOT! YOU'RE SO LOUD, THEY CAN HEAR.
HM?
ME? AN IDIOT? NO WAY.

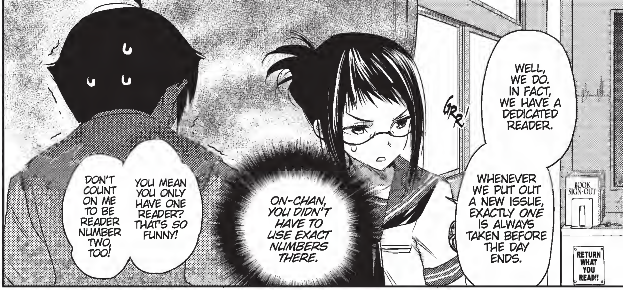

I AM SIMPLY EXPRESSING AN OBSERVATION OF HOW A YOUNG MAN STARING EXCESSIVELY AT YOUNG WOMEN IN SWIMSUITS MAY APPEAR TO OTHERS...
AS "A WHOLE LOT LIKE HARASSMENT."
I-I WASN'T STARING AT THE GIRLS' SWIMSUITS!
OH? YOU WERE LOOKING AT THE *BOYS*, THEN?
INTENTLY. FOR OVER TEN MINUTES. SIGHING YOUR HAPPY LITTLE SIGHS.
......!!
THOUGH, IT *IS* TRUE THAT BOYS' SWIMSUITS ARE MORE REVEALING.
THEIR ENTIRE TORSO IS NAKED, AFTER ALL. FUNNY HOW A MERE SIZE DIFFERENCE CAN MAKE BOYS SO INDIFFERENT ABOUT EXPOSING THEIR BREASTS.
THUS, THEY HAVE FALLEN PREY TO THE CAPTAIN'S SPECIAL TASTES.
DON'T YOU ROLL YOUR EYES AT ME!
AND NO! I WAS NOT STARING AT MAN-BOOBS!
OKAY!
ENOUGH ALREADY! I ADMIT IT!
WHRL
ばっ
I ADMIT THAT I *WAS* STARING AT THE GIRLS, JUST LIKE *THIS!* ARE YOU HAPPY, NOW?!
NOW, CAN WE PLEASE STOP?! SERIOUSLY! THEY CAN HEAR US DOWN THERE!
AAAAUGH!
YOU'RE QUITE THE LOST CAUSE, CAPTAIN.
NOW HURRY UP AND FINISH YOUR COLUMN.

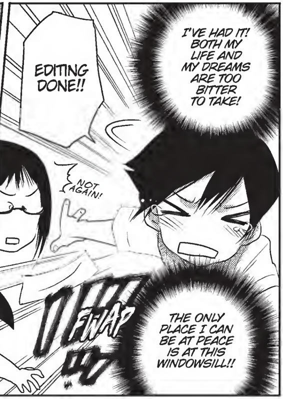

ぐぞーーーーん
DUH-DUUUN
FIVE O'CLOCK TODAY IS THE DEADLINE! GOT IT?!
THE MANGA CLUB'S *ONLY* OFFICIAL DUTIES ARE TO UPDATE OUR WEB PAGE AND PUBLISH OUR SCHOOL ANTHOLOGY TWICE A MONTH! WE CAN'T AFFORD TO SLACK OFF!
SWIMSUITS, MAN-BOOBS, WHATEVER... NOW IS NOT THE TIME TO BE STARING AT EITHER!
MY ARTICLE, OF COURSE, IS ALREADY FINISHED.
BLEH
ON-CHAN IS AMAZING. NO, I MEAN IT. SHE IS.
OUR CLUB IS POPULATED BY A BUNCH OF LAZY SLOBS. EVEN I SOMETIMES FEEL LIKE GIVING UP ON IT.
I FINISHED MY ARTICLES AND PRINTED THEM ALL AT HOME.
WOW! YOU WROTE THIS MUCH?
OUR MAGAZINE IS NOW LESS A SCHOOL NEWSPAPER AND MORE YOUR PERSONAL JOURNAL, CAPTAIN.
From A Manga-ka's POV
How to Read and Analyze Mang
[?something??] by Yoshimatsu
Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, co
elit. Morbi auctor vitae erat ac
quam tortor, commodo non do
viverra orci. Nunc at sapien ve
congue dignissim sed dolor.
Donec ante urna, pharetra ve
suada fringilla ipsum. Nam p
pharetra sapien sollicitudin
convallis, mattis risus facilis
Interdum et malesuada fam
in faucibus. Ut facilisis trist
Ut nec eleifend massa.
Duis luctus lorem in conse
tibulum in eleifend urna. F
tempor scelerisque. Mae
nunc sit amet molestie. S
tibulum at diam eu urna
nec tellus. Nullam nec p
Fusce placerat dictum c
faucibus quis. Etiam al
feugiat neque lobortis
cursus, finibus dolor b
lentesque imperdiet d
egestas a. Suspendis
a dictum scelerisque,
nisi laoreet, hendrer
Donec vulputate et l
faucibus mauris. Se
habitasse platea di
Sed faucibus pulvi
ante, semper eget
Duis viverra facili
egestas rutrum. F
ulum placerat, nib
GO AHEAD AND WRITE UP AS MANY ARTICLES AND DRAW AS MANY MANGA AS YOU WANT, TOO, ON-CHAN. *YOU'LL* BE THE NEXT CAPTAIN, AFTER ALL.
OH NO, NOT ME! I COULD *NEVER* BE CAPTAIN.
C'MON. OPEN YOUR EYES. WE'RE THE ONLY ONES WHO'RE TAKING THIS CLUB SERIOUSLY.

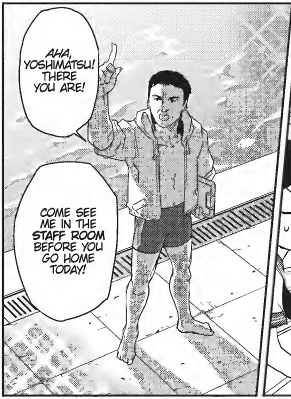

EVERYBODY ELSE IS JUST SITTING AROUND READING MANGA. HECK, THERE ARE EVEN PEOPLE IN HERE WHO *AREN'T* IN THE CLUB.
C'MON WAKE UP!
AAAUGH!!
TWITCH
KTUNK
DAMMIT!!
I WAS IN THE MIDDLE OF A RAUNCHY ROMP-FEST OF A DREAM, Y'KNOW!!
YEAH? SO WHAT'S RAUNCHY? IS THAT, LIKE, A SALAD DRESSING?
WHAT?! HAVEN'T YOU EVER HEARD THAT WORD BEFORE?!
I SEE SOGA-SEMPAI HAS A DIFFERENT GIRLFRIEND FROM LAST WEEK.
WHO IS THAT?
DROP THE DUMB BLONDE ACT WOULD YA?!
WHATEVS~!
AND "RAUNCHY" DREAMS IN THE MIDDLE OF THE SCHOOL DAY? TALK ABOUT RAMPANT HORMONES.
HA HA HA...
THEN THERE'RE GUYS LIKE HIM.
RAUNCHY DREAMS, *EH...?*
ME...

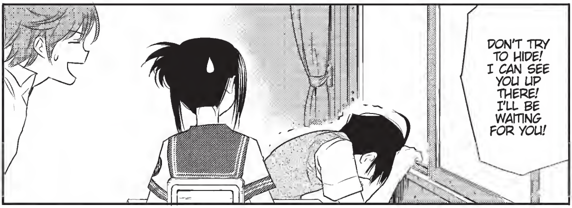

I DON'T EVEN GET TO DREAM ABOUT AWAYA NIKI.
NO, NO, NO! A RAUNCH FEST IS--
WHIRL
AHA! ON-CHAN! YOU'VE HAD ROWDY DREAMS, RIGHT?! YOU KNOW WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT!
I'VE HAD SO MANY, I CAN EVEN MAKE MYSELF DREAM THEM ON COMMAND!
THE BEST ONES ARE WHEN YOU'RE IN THAT HALF-ASLEEP, HALF-AWAKE STATE WHERE DREAM AND REALITY START TO MERGE--
CAPTAIN, I'VE FOUND A TYPO.
HAND IT OVER.
C'MON, GUYS! DON'T IGNORE ME!
HOTAKA! SURELY YOU'VE HAD NAUGHTY DREAMS?
NO. NEVER.
WHENEVER I REALIZE I'M HAVING A DREAM...
POK
IT ALWAYS WARPS INTO THE SAME NIGHTMARE EVERY TIME.

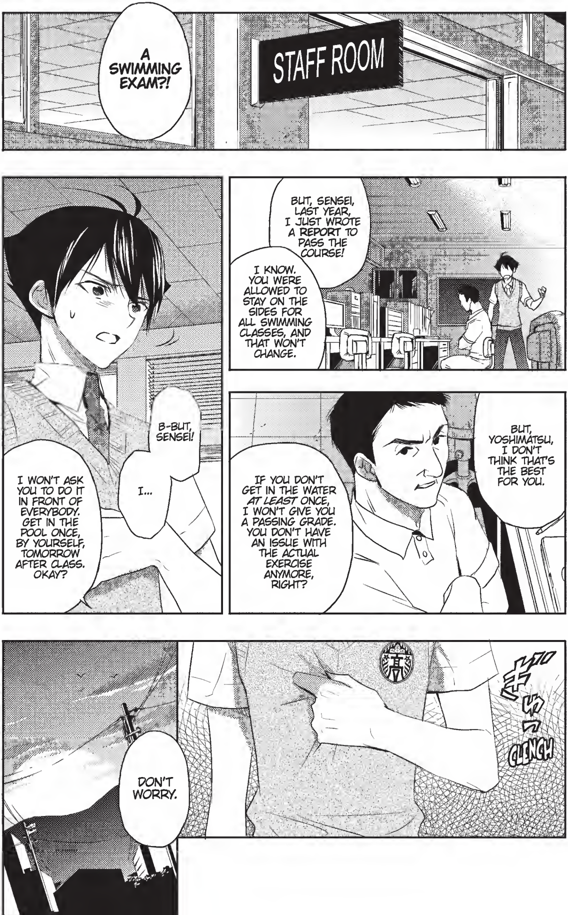

THEN I'M JOLTED AWAKE, SHAKING AND SWEATY, DENYING THAT IT HAPPENED AGAIN.
SO I DON'T LIKE TALKING ABOUT DREAMS. OKAY?
WHOOPS! I WAS SO MIFFED AT SOGA BEING DUMB THAT I RAN MY MOUTH.
AND NOW, EVERYBODY'S STARING AT ME SLACK-JAWED. CAN THIS GET ANY WORSE?
OH SO, LIKE, THE MANGA CLUB PUTS OUT A MAGAZINE?
LEAN
WOW! I TOTES NEVER WOULD'VE GUESSED. I'VE, LIKE, NEVER SEEN ANY.
THANK YOU, SOGA'S GIRLFRIEND! THOUGH, I'D RATHER NOT HAVE HEARD WHAT YOU JUST SAID.

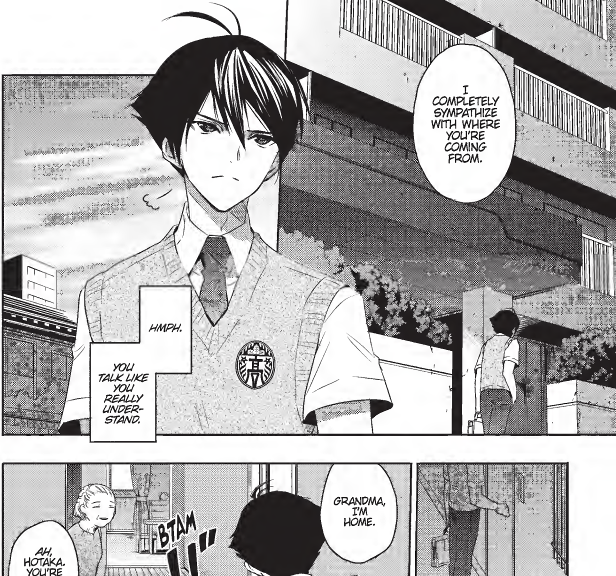

WELL, WE DO. IN FACT, WE HAVE A DEDICATED READER.
GRR!
WHENEVER WE PUT OUT A NEW ISSUE, EXACTLY ONE IS ALWAYS TAKEN BEFORE THE DAY ENDS.
BOOK SIGN-OUT
RETURN WHAT YOU READ!!
ON-CHAN, YOU DIDN'T HAVE TO USE EXACT NUMBERS THERE.
YOU MEAN YOU ONLY HAVE ONE READER? THAT'S SO FUNNY!
DON'T COUNT ON ME TO BE READER NUMBER TWO, TOO!

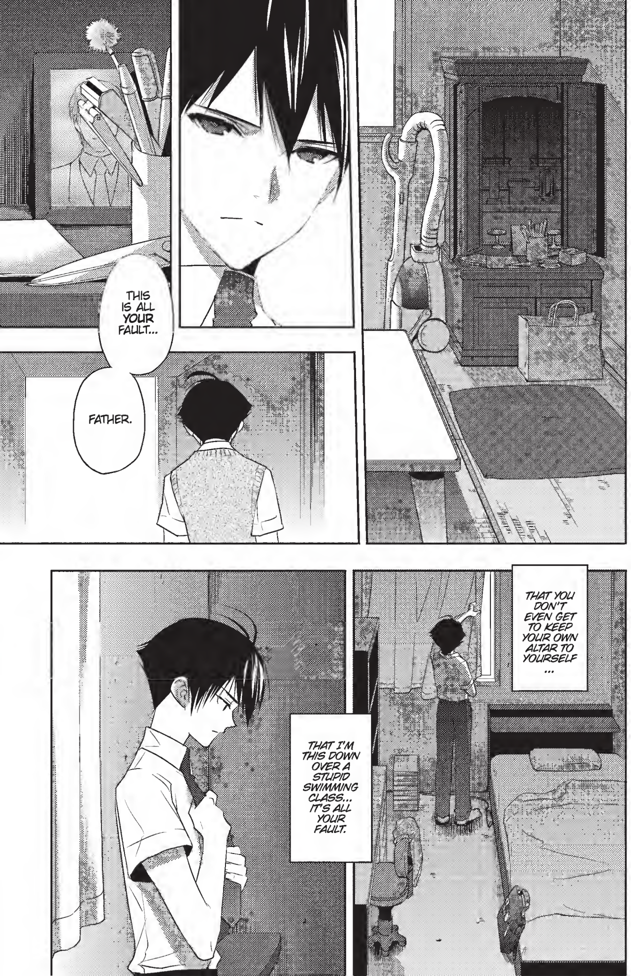

I'VE HAD IT! BOTH MY LIFE AND MY DREAMS ARE TOO BITTER TO TAKE!
EDITING DONE!!
NOT AGAIN!
FWAP
THE ONLY PLACE I CAN BE AT PEACE IS AT THIS WINDOWSILL!!

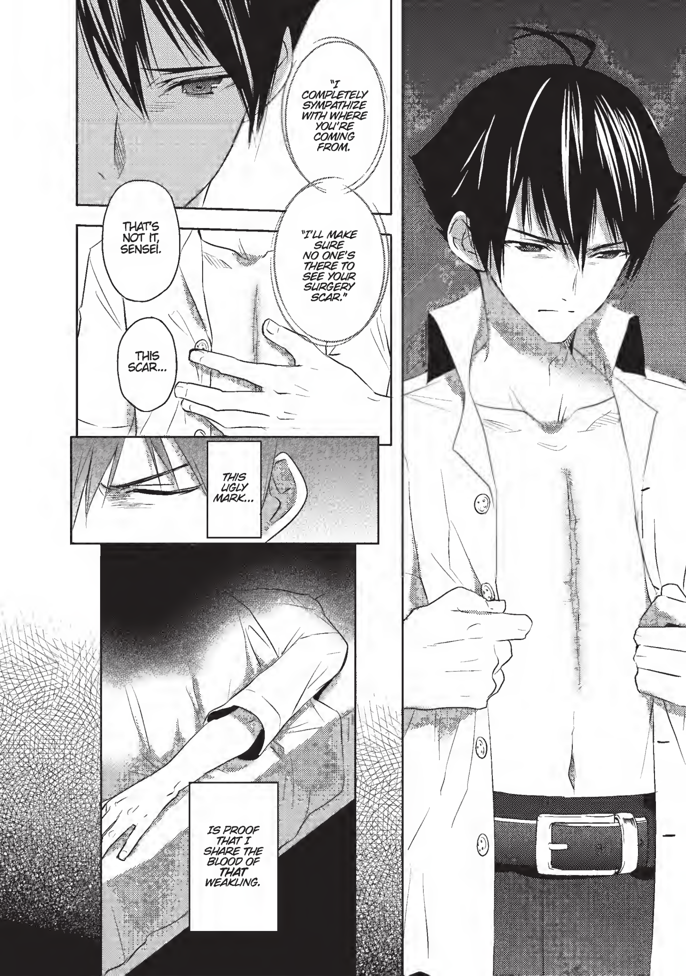

AHA, YOSHIMATSU! THERE YOU ARE!
COME SEE ME IN THE STAFF ROOM BEFORE YOU GO HOME TODAY!

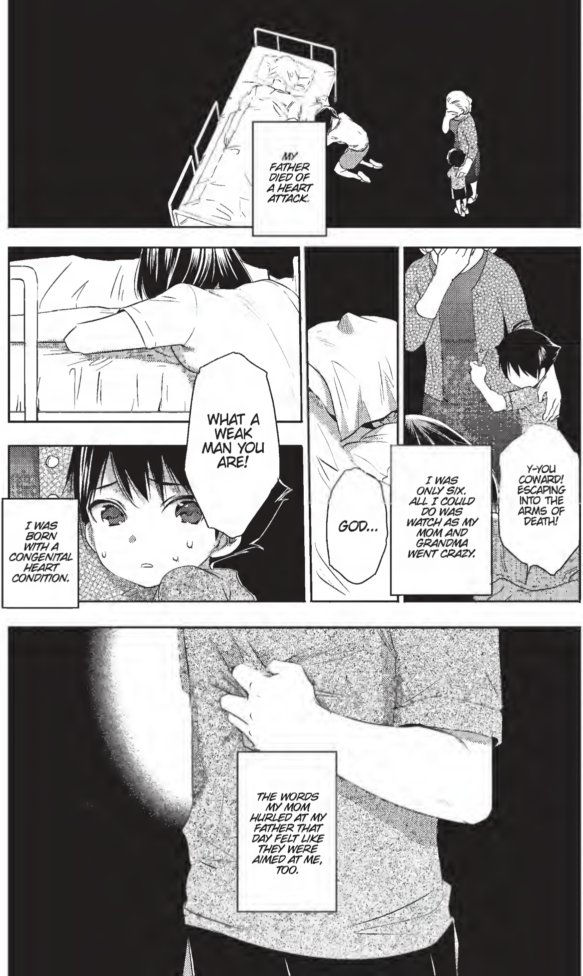

DON'T TRY TO HIDE! I CAN SEE YOU UP THERE! I'LL BE WAITING FOR YOU!

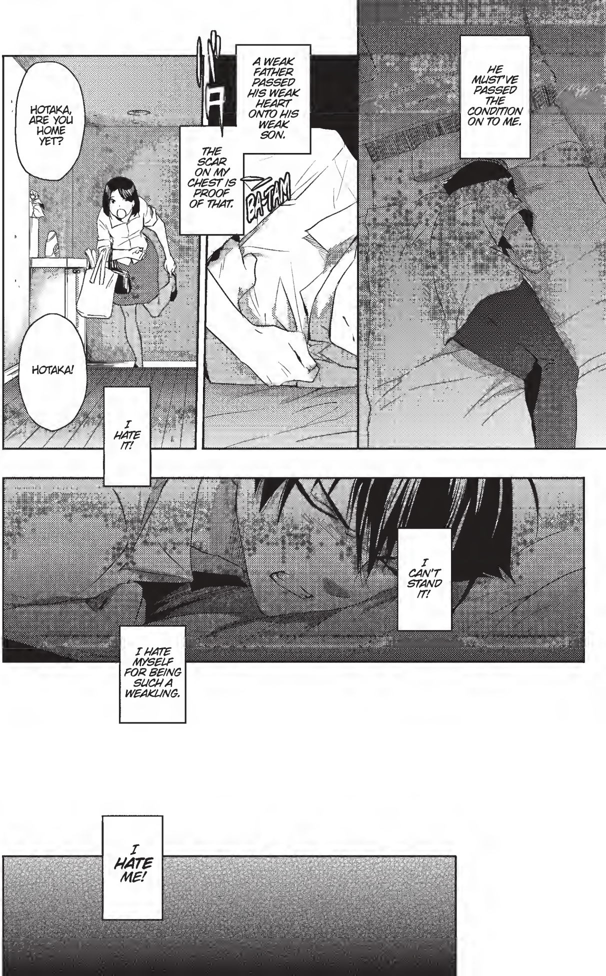

STAFF ROOM
A SWIMMING EXAM?!
BUT, SENSEI, LAST YEAR, I JUST WROTE A REPORT TO PASS THE COURSE!
I KNOW. YOU WERE ALLOWED TO STAY ON THE SIDES FOR ALL SWIMMING CLASSES, AND THAT WON'T CHANGE.
BUT, YOSHIMATSU, I DON'T THINK THAT'S THE BEST FOR YOU.
IF YOU DON'T GET IN THE WATER *AT LEAST* ONCE, I WON'T GIVE YOU A PASSING GRADE. YOU DON'T HAVE AN ISSUE WITH THE ACTUAL EXERCISE ANYMORE, RIGHT?
B-BUT, SENSEI!
I...
I WON'T ASK YOU TO DO IT IN FRONT OF EVERYBODY. GET IN THE POOL ONCE, BY YOURSELF, TOMORROW AFTER CLASS. OKAY?
ギュッ
CLENCH
DON'T WORRY.

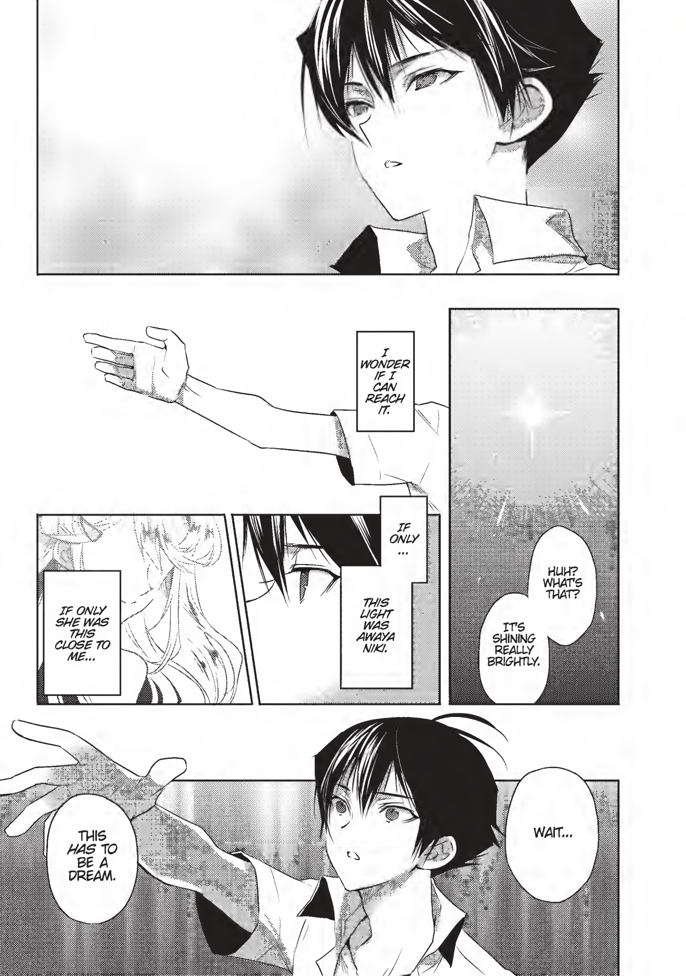

I COMPLETELY SYMPATHIZE WITH WHERE YOU'RE COMING FROM.
HMPH.
YOU TALK LIKE YOU REALLY UNDERSTAND.
ガチャン
KCHAK
GRANDMA, I'M HOME.
BTAM
バタン
AH, HOTAKA. YOU'RE LATE TODAY.
YOUR MOTHER WILL BE BACK SOON. WE'LL HAVE DINNER SHORTLY.
OKAY.

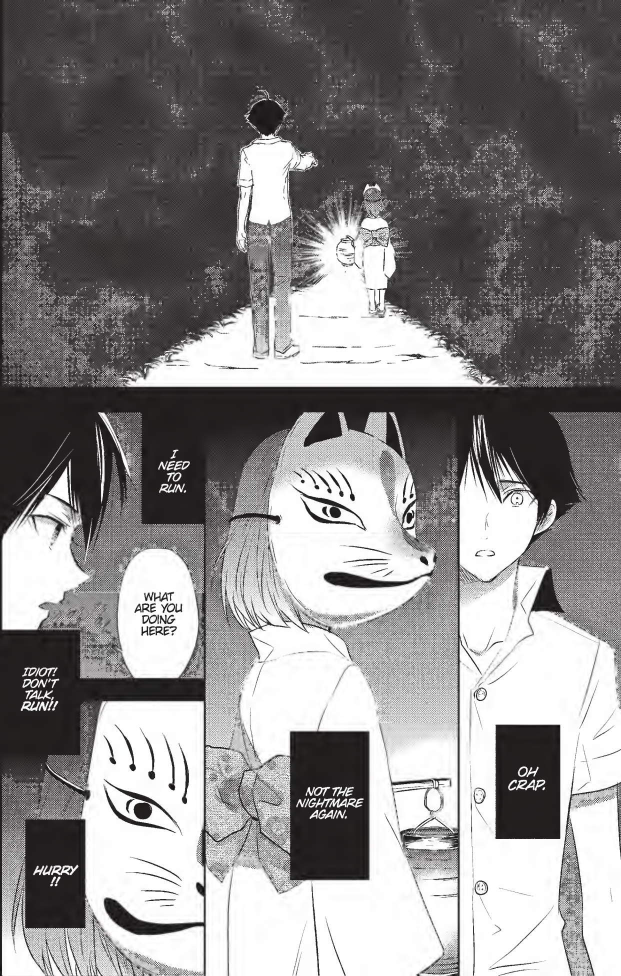

THIS IS ALL YOUR FAULT...
FATHER.
THAT YOU DON'T EVEN GET TO KEEP YOUR OWN ALTAR TO YOURSELF ...
THAT I'M THIS DOWN OVER A STUPID SWIMMING CLASS... IT'S ALL YOUR FAULT.

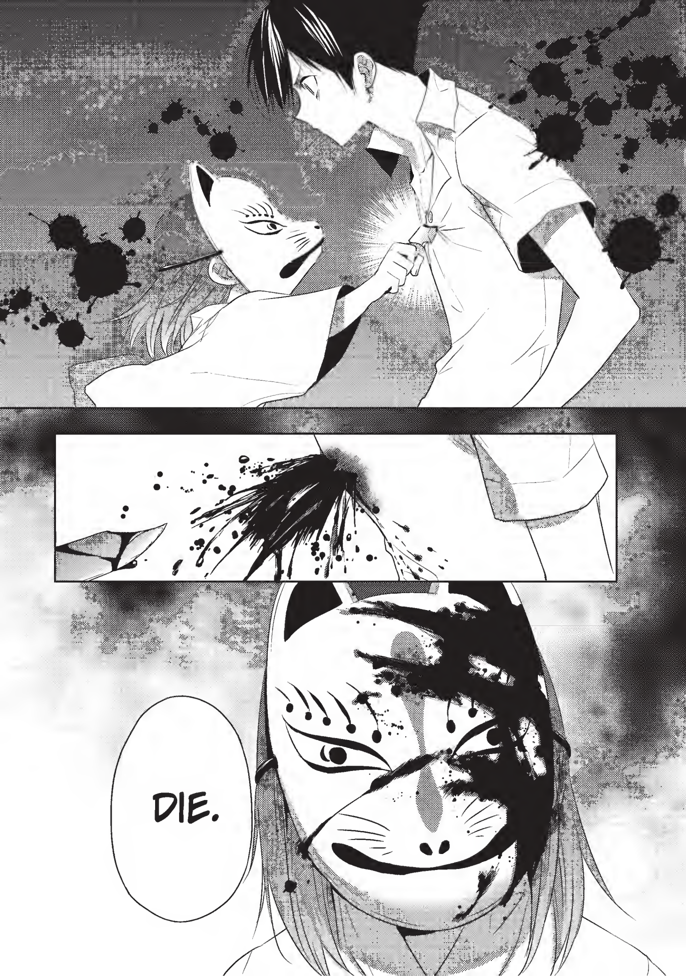

"I COMPLETELY SYMPATHIZE WITH WHERE YOU'RE COMING FROM.
"I'LL MAKE SURE NO ONE'S THERE TO SEE YOUR SURGERY SCAR."
THAT'S NOT IT, SENSEI.
THIS SCAR...
THIS UGLY MARK...
IS PROOF THAT I SHARE THE BLOOD OF THAT WEAKLING.

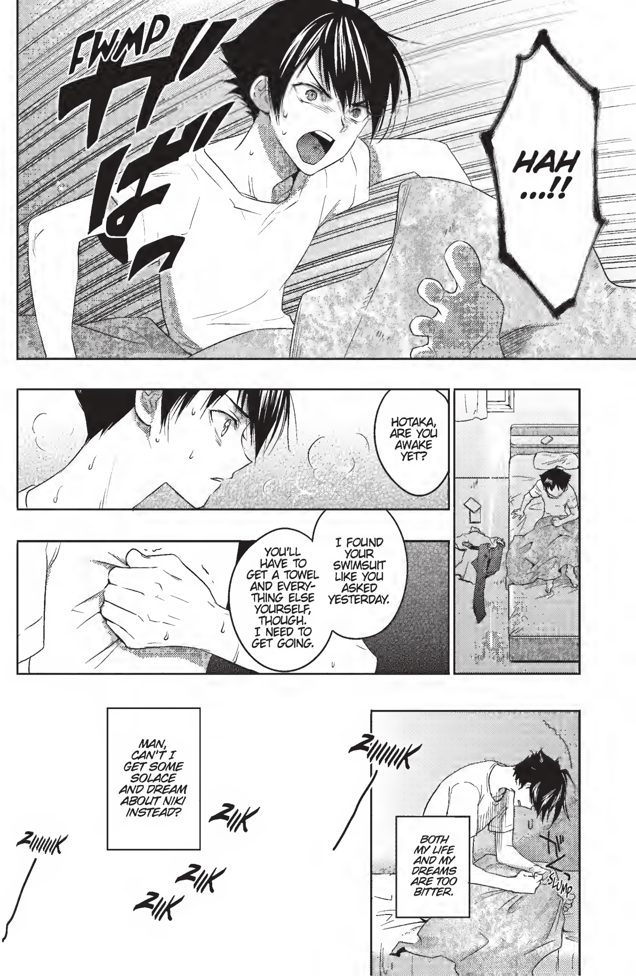

MY FATHER DIED OF A HEART ATTACK.
Y-YOU COWARD! ESCAPING INTO THE ARMS OF DEATH!
I WAS ONLY SIX. ALL I COULD DO WAS WATCH AS MY MOM AND GRANDMA WENT CRAZY.
GOD...
WHAT A WEAK MAN YOU ARE!
I WAS BORN WITH A CONGENITAL HEART CONDITION.
THE WORDS MY MOM HURLED AT MY FATHER THAT DAY FELT LIKE THEY WERE AIMED AT ME, TOO.

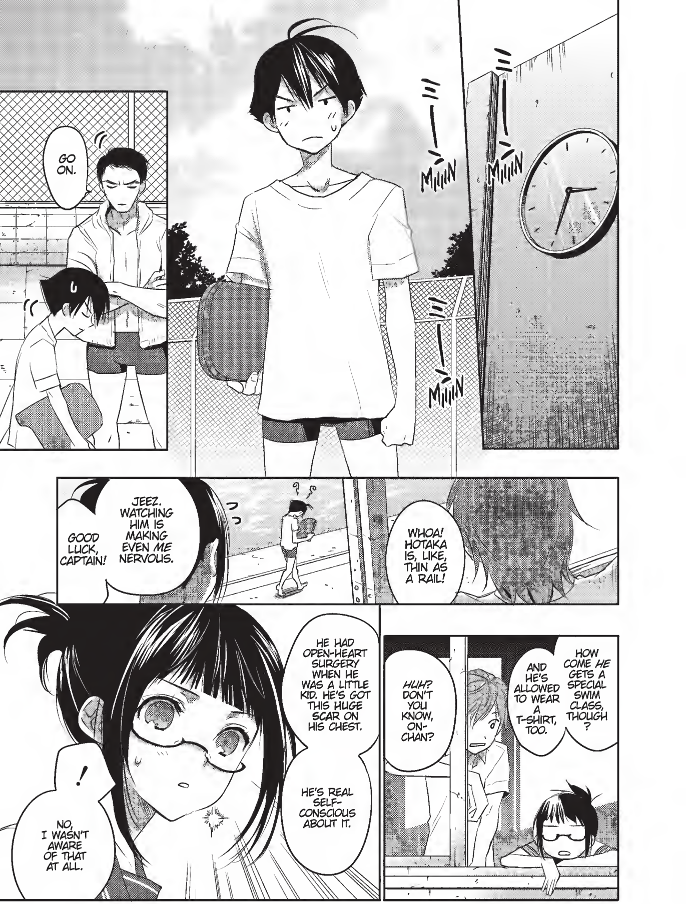

HE MUST'VE PASSED THE CONDITION ON TO ME.
A WEAK FATHER PASSED HIS WEAK HEART ONTO HIS WEAK SON.
THE SCAR ON MY CHEST IS PROOF OF THAT.
BA-TAM
HOTAKA, ARE YOU HOME YET?
HOTAKA!
I HATE IT!
I CAN'T STAND IT!
I HATE MYSELF FOR BEING SUCH A WEAKLING.
I HATE ME!

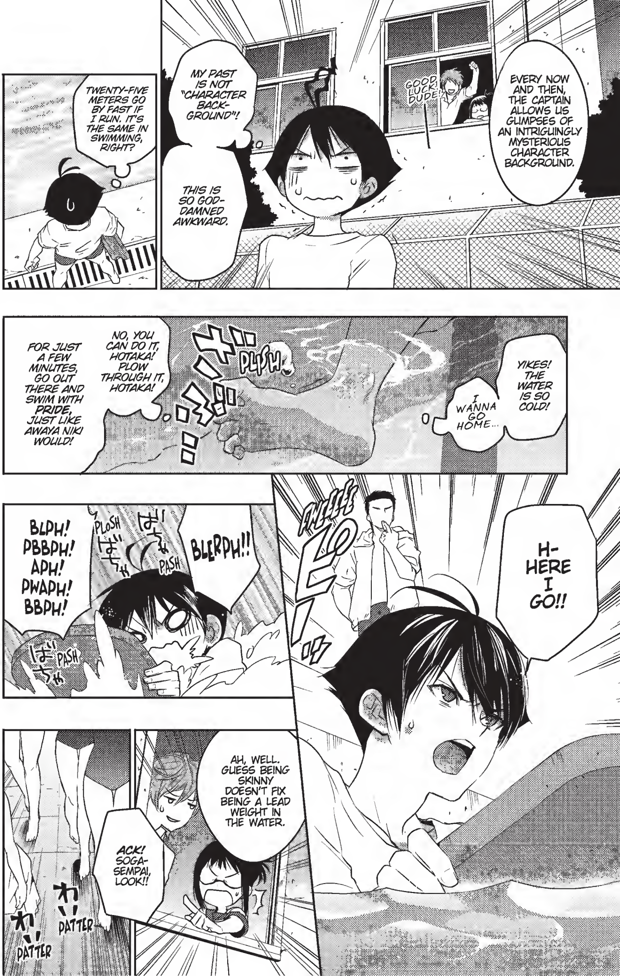

HUH? WHAT'S THAT?
IT'S SHINING REALLY BRIGHTLY.
I WONDER IF I CAN REACH IT.
IF ONLY ...
THIS LIGHT WAS AWAYA NIKI.
IF ONLY SHE WAS THIS CLOSE TO ME...
WAIT...
THIS HAS TO BE A DREAM.

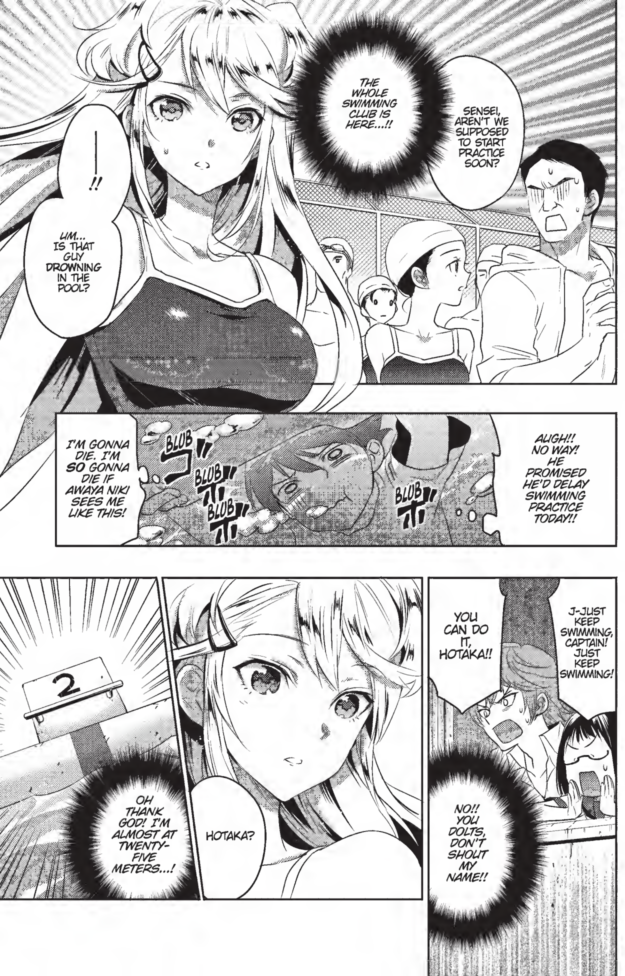

OH CRAP.
NOT THE NIGHTMARE AGAIN.
I NEED TO RUN.
WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?
IDIOT! DON'T TALK, RUN!!
HURRY!!

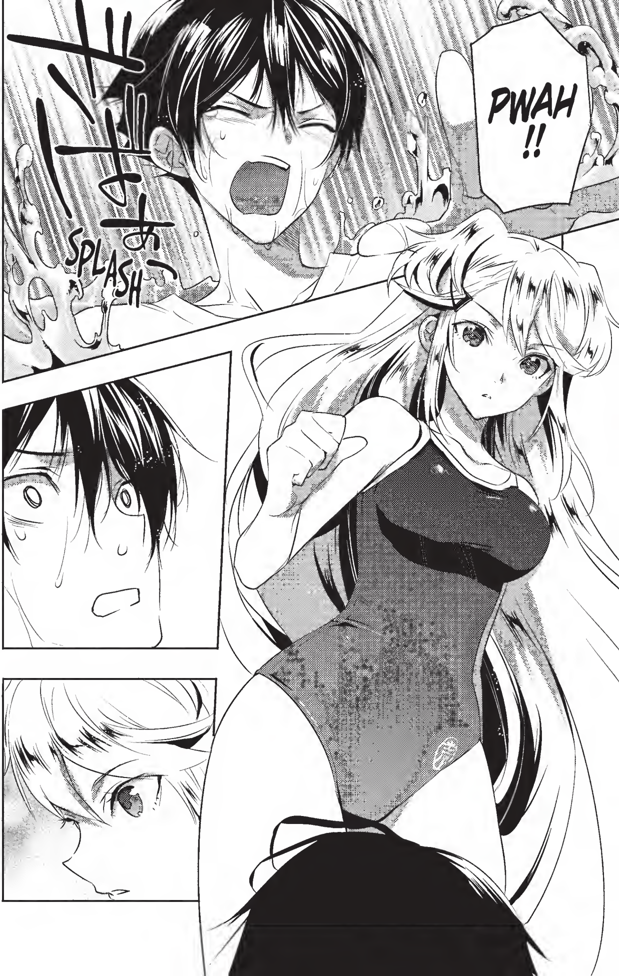

DIE.

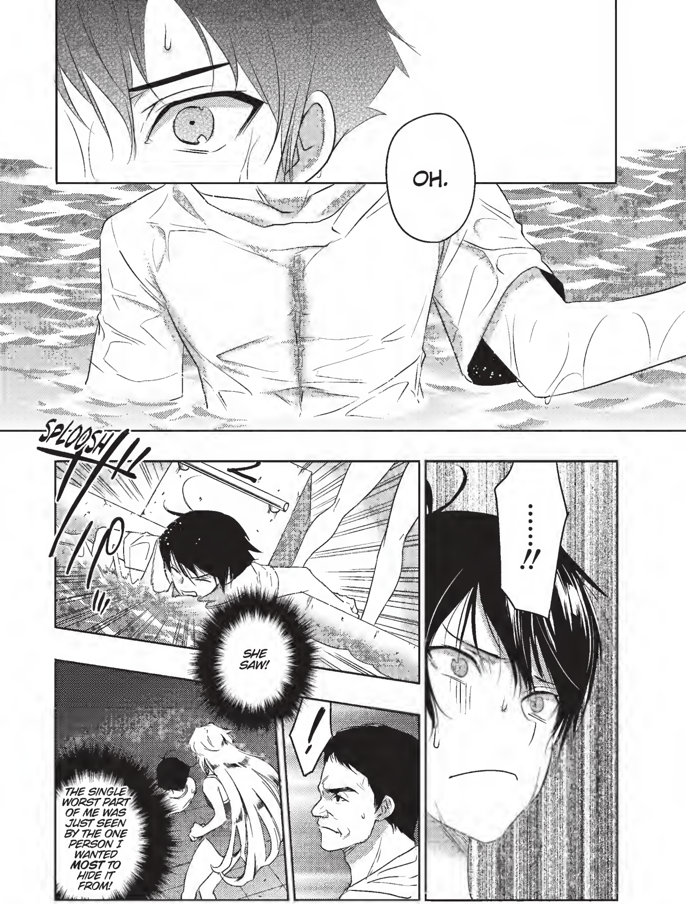

FWMP
HAH ...!!
HOTAKA, ARE YOU AWAKE YET?
I FOUND YOUR SWIMSUIT LIKE YOU ASKED YESTERDAY.
YOU'LL HAVE TO GET A TOWEL AND EVERYTHING ELSE YOURSELF, THOUGH. I NEED TO GET GOING.
ZIIIIIIK
BOTH MY LIFE AND MY DREAMS ARE TOO BITTER.
SLUMP
MAN, CAN'T I GET SOME SOLACE AND DREAM ABOUT NIKI INSTEAD?
ZIIK
ZIIIIIIK
ZIIK
ZIIK

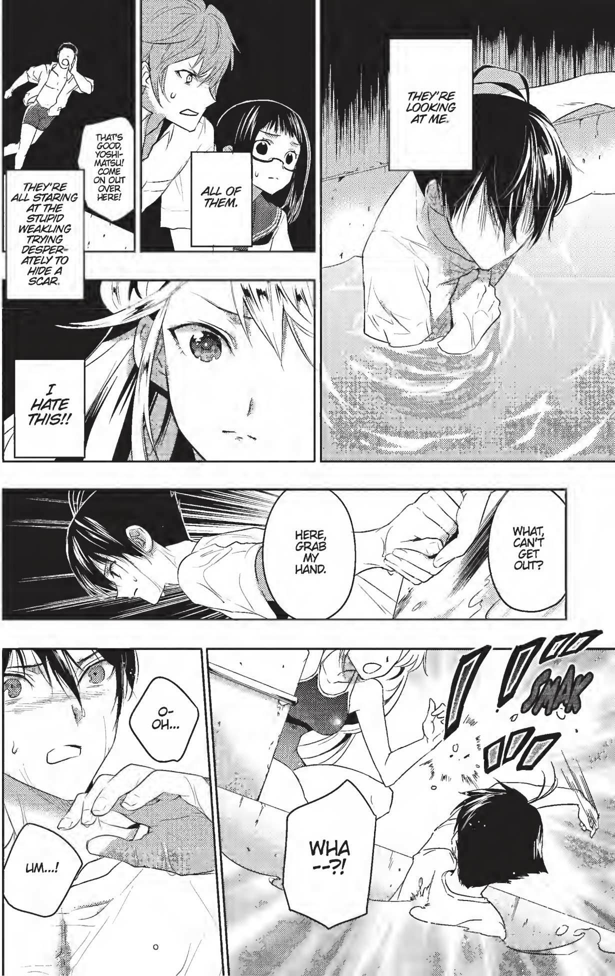

ミーン
MIIIN
ミーン
MIIIN
ミーン
MIIIN
GO ON.
WHOA! HOTAKA IS, LIKE, THIN AS A RAIL!
JEEZ. WATCHING HIM IS MAKING EVEN *ME* NERVOUS.
GOOD LUCK, CAPTAIN!
HOW COME *HE* GETS A SPECIAL SWIM CLASS, THOUGH?
AND HE'S ALLOWED TO WEAR A T-SHIRT, TOO.
HUH? DON'T YOU KNOW, ON-CHAN?
HE HAD OPEN-HEART SURGERY WHEN HE WAS A LITTLE KID. HE'S GOT THIS HUGE SCAR ON HIS CHEST.
HE'S REAL SELF-CONSCIOUS ABOUT IT.
!
NO, I WASN'T AWARE OF THAT AT ALL.

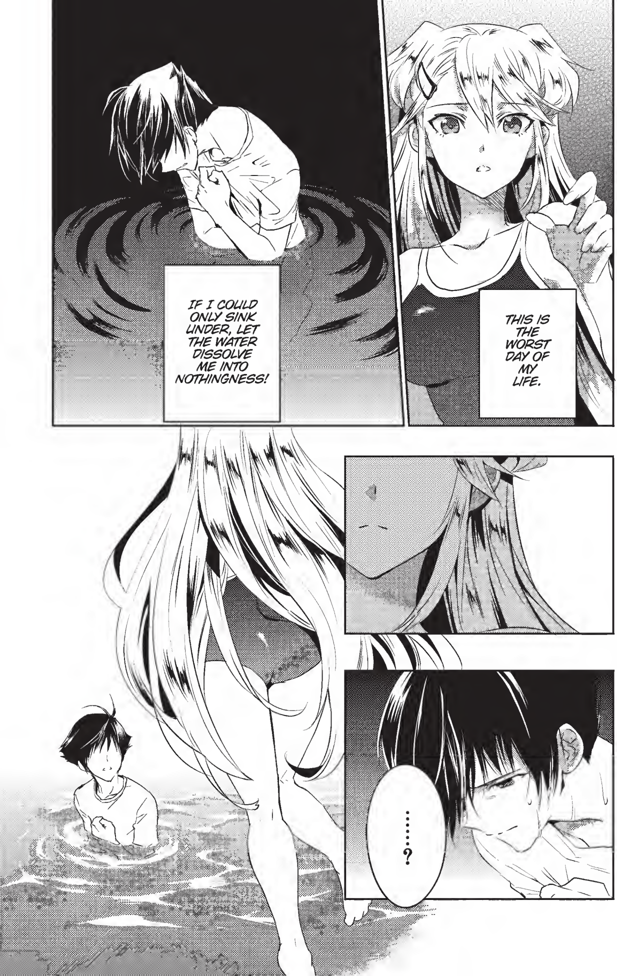

EVERY NOW AND THEN, THE CAPTAIN ALLOWS US GLIMPSES OF AN INTRIGUINGLY MYSTERIOUS CHARACTER BACKGROUND.
GOOD LUCK! DUDE!
MY PAST IS NOT "CHARACTER BACKGROUND"!
THIS IS SO GOD-DAMNED AWKWARD.
TWENTY-FIVE METERS GO BY FAST IF I RUN. IT'S THE SAME IN SWIMMING, RIGHT?
YIKES! THE WATER IS SO COLD!
I WANNA GO HOME...
PLISH
NO, YOU CAN DO IT, HOTAKA! PLOW THROUGH IT, HOTAKA!
FOR JUST A FEW MINUTES, GO OUT THERE AND SWIM WITH PRIDE, JUST LIKE AWAYA NIKI WOULD!
H-HERE I GO!!
PWEEEEE
ピーッ
BLERPH!!
ばちゃ PASH
ばちゃ PLOSH
BLPH! PBBPH! APH! PWAPH! BBPH!
ばちゃ PASH
AH, WELL. GUESS BEING SKINNY DOESN'T FIX BEING A LEAD WEIGHT IN THE WATER.
ACK! SOGA-SEMPAI, LOOK!!
PATTER
PATTER

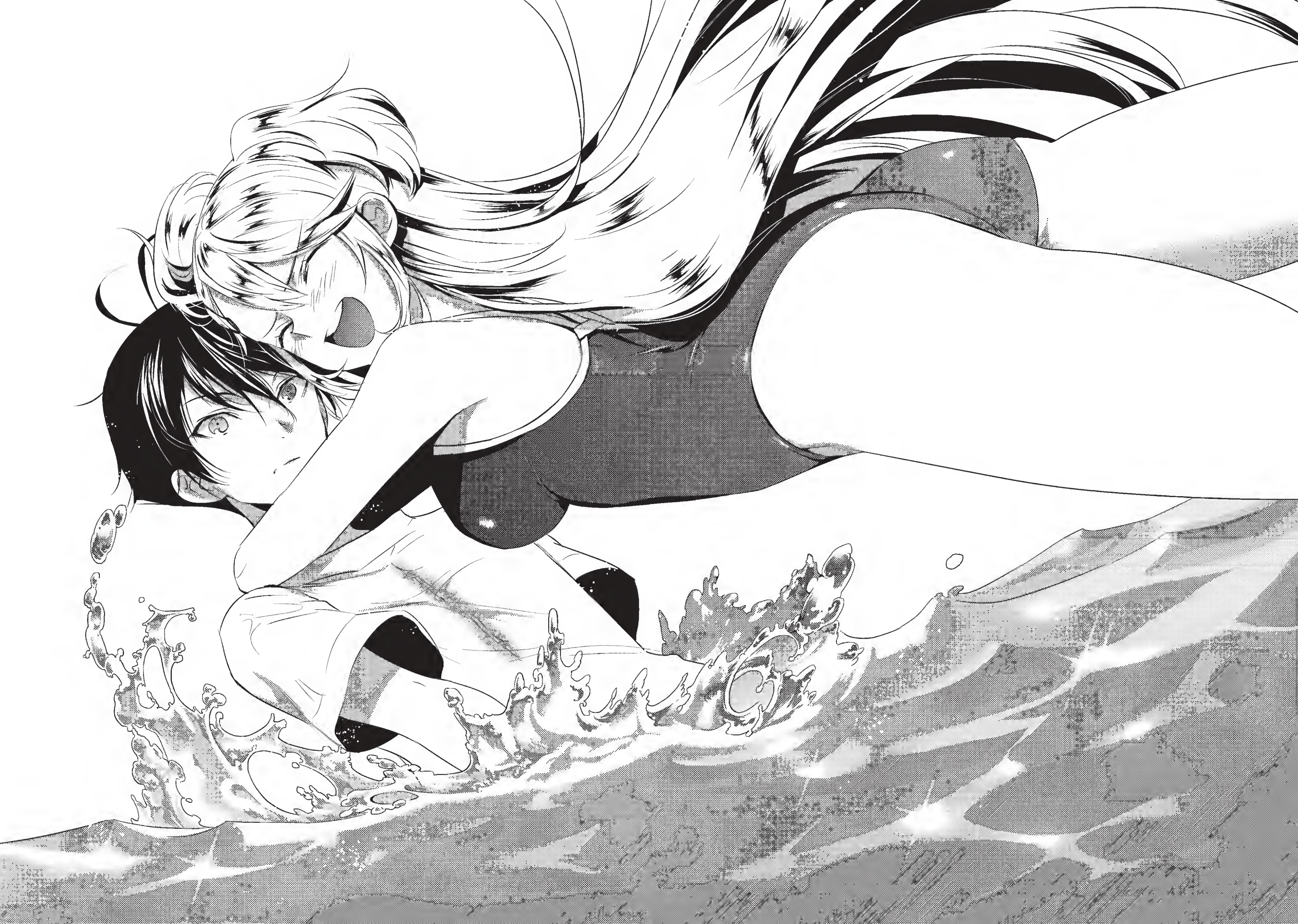

SENSEI, AREN'T WE SUPPOSED TO START PRACTICE SOON?
THE WHOLE SWIMMING CLUB IS HERE...!!
—!!
UM... IS THAT GUY DROWNING IN THE POOL?
AUGH!! NO WAY! HE PROMISED HE'D DELAY SWIMMING PRACTICE TODAY!!
BLUB
BLUB
BLUB
BLUB
I'M GONNA DIE. I'M **SO** GONNA DIE IF AWAYA NIKI SEES ME LIKE THIS!
J-JUST KEEP SWIMMING, CAPTAIN! JUST KEEP SWIMMING!
YOU CAN DO IT, HOTAKA!!
NO!! YOU DOLTS, DON'T SHOUT MY NAME!!
HOTAKA?
2
OH THANK GOD! I'M ALMOST AT TWENTY-FIVE METERS...!

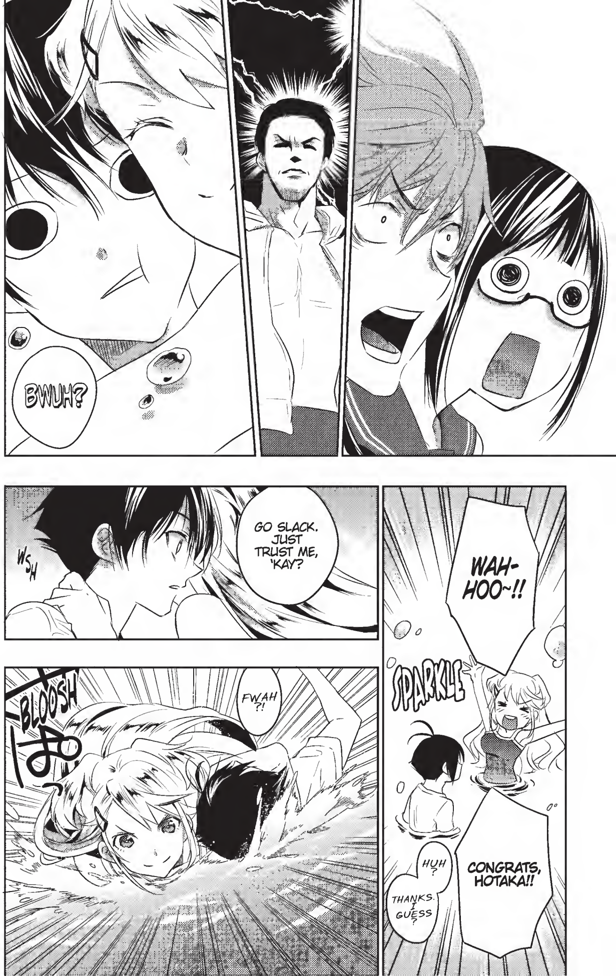

PWAH !!
SPLASH

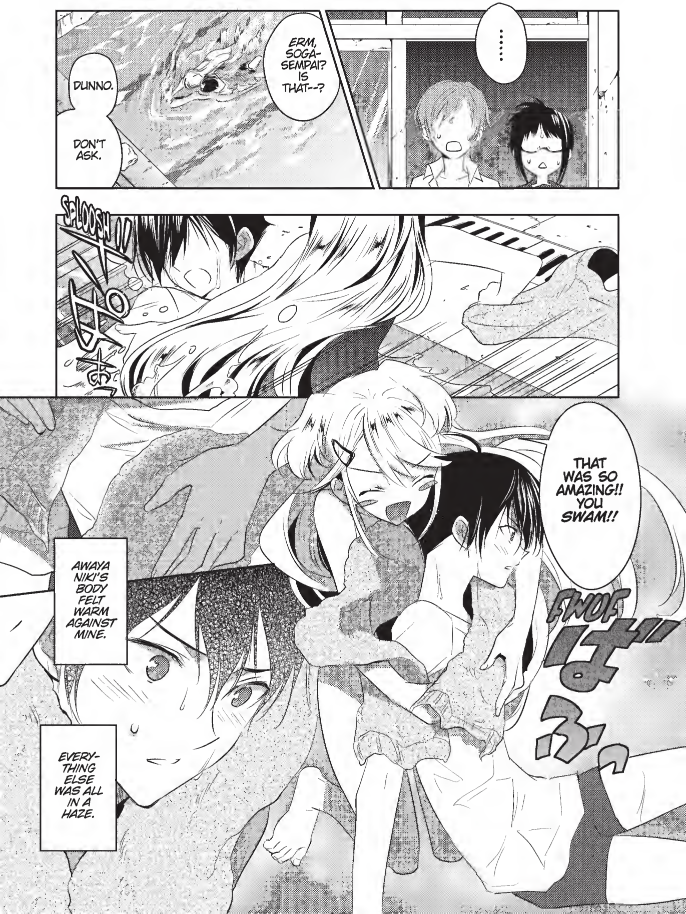

OH.
......!!
SPLOOSH
SHE SAW!
!
THE SINGLE WORST PART OF ME WAS JUST SEEN BY THE ONE PERSON I WANTED MOST TO HIDE IT FROM!

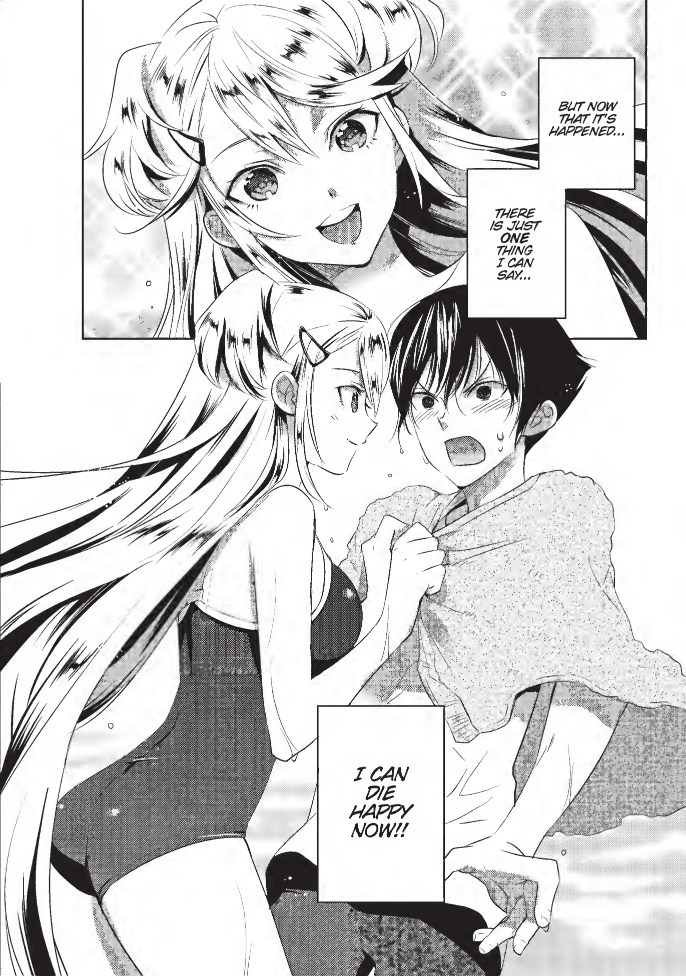

THEY'RE LOOKING AT ME.
ALL OF THEM.
THAT'S GOOD, YOSHIMATSU! COME ON OUT OVER HERE!
THEY'RE ALL STARING AT THE STUPID WEAKLING TRYING DESPERATELY TO HIDE A SCAR.
I HATE THIS!!
WHAT, CAN'T GET OUT?
HERE, GRAB MY HAND.
SMAK
WHA--?!
O-OH...
UM...!

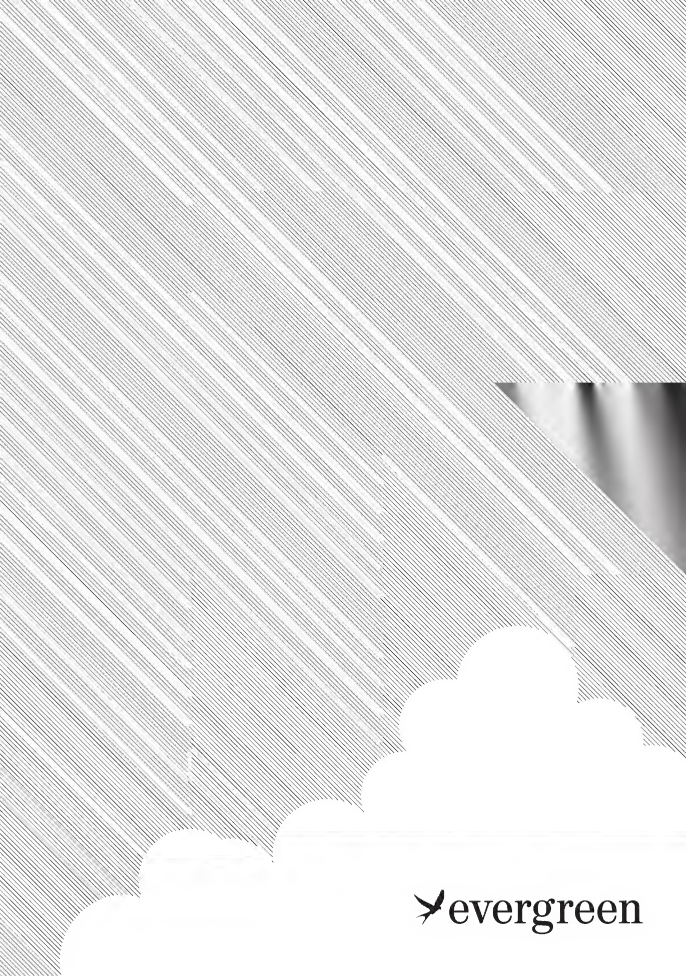

THIS IS THE WORST DAY OF MY LIFE.
IF I COULD ONLY SINK UNDER, LET THE WATER DISSOLVE ME INTO NOTHINGNESS!
......?

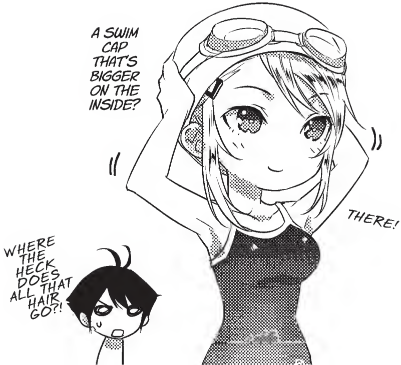


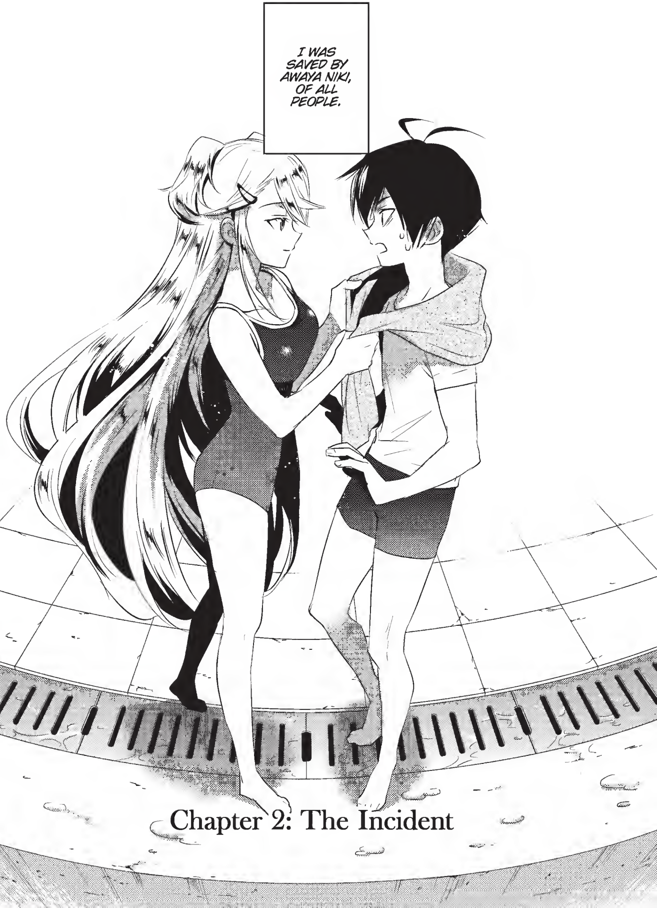

BWUH?
GO SLACK. JUST TRUST ME, 'KAY?
WSH
FWAH?!
BLOOSH
ばっ
WAH-HOO~!!
SPARKLE
CONGRATS, HOTAKA!!
HUH?
THANKS. I GUESS?


……
ERM, SOGA-SEMPAI? IS THAT--?
DUNNO.
DON'T ASK.
SPLOOSH!!
THAT WAS SO AMAZING!! YOU SWAM!!
FWUF
ばふっ
AWAYA NIKI'S BODY FELT WARM AGAINST MINE.
EVERYTHING ELSE WAS ALL IN A HAZE.

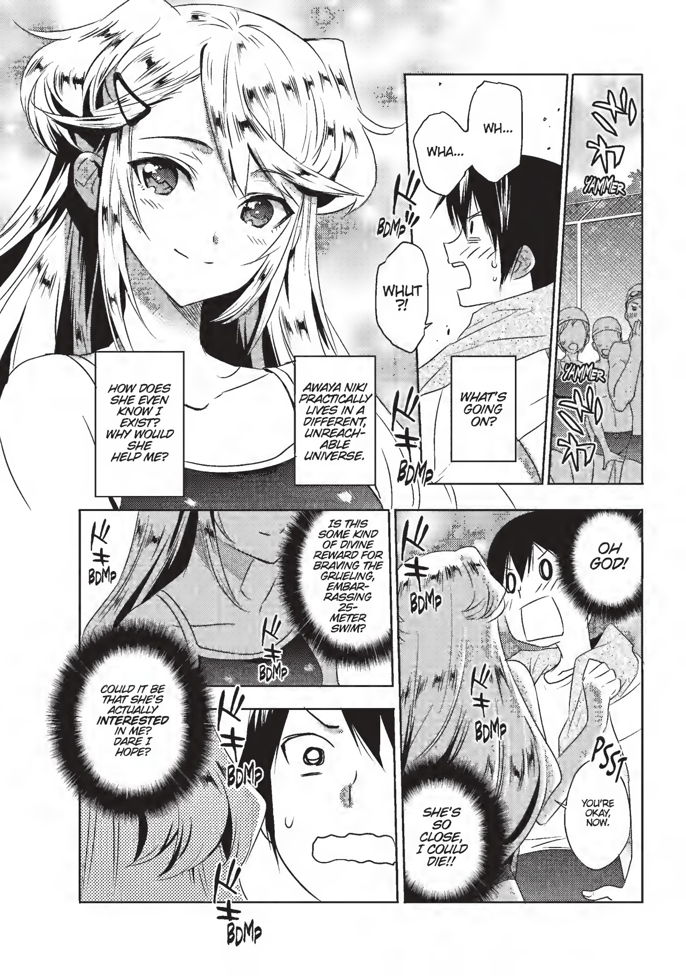

BUT NOW THAT IT'S HAPPENED...
THERE IS JUST ONE THING I CAN SAY...
I CAN DIE HAPPY NOW!!

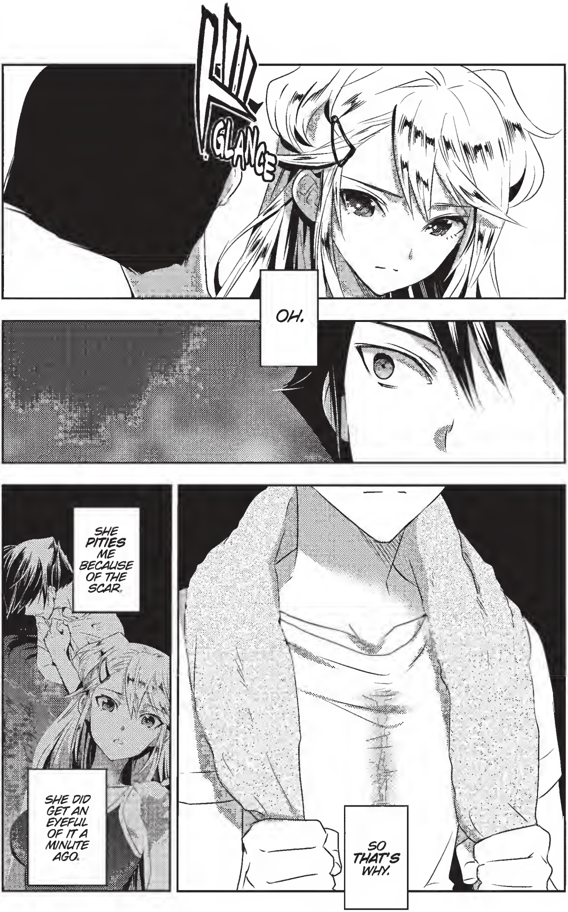

evergreen

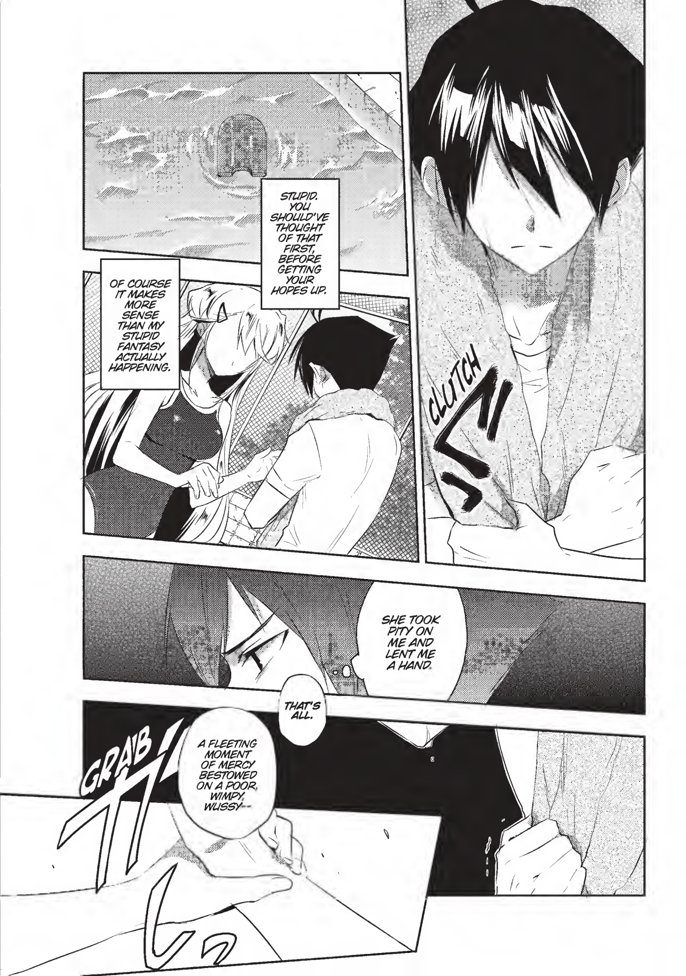

A SWIM CAP THAT'S BIGGER ON THE INSIDE?
THERE!
WHERE THE HECK DOES ALL THAT HAIR GO?!

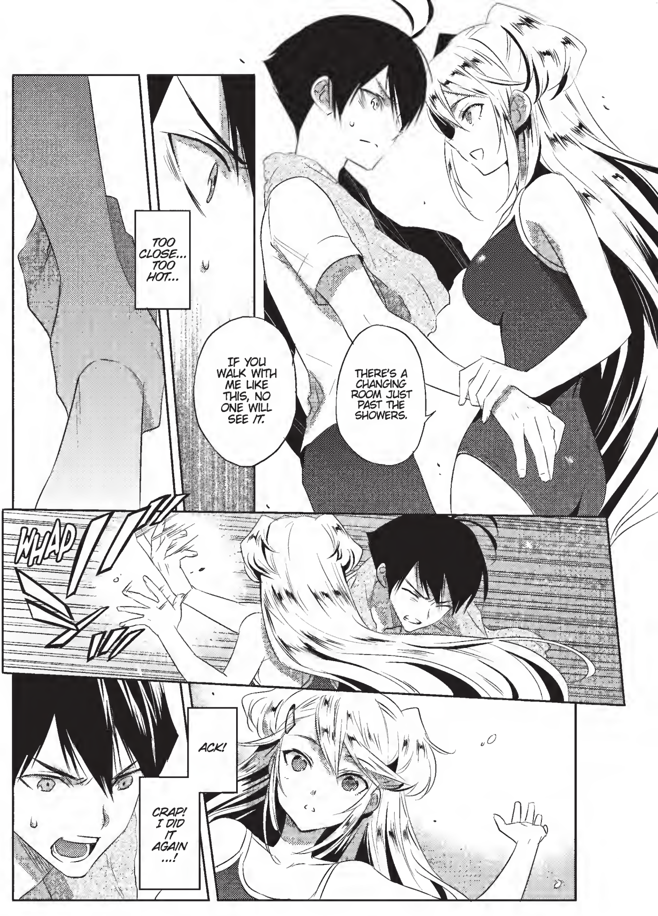

I WAS SAVED BY AWAYA NIKI, OF ALL PEOPLE.

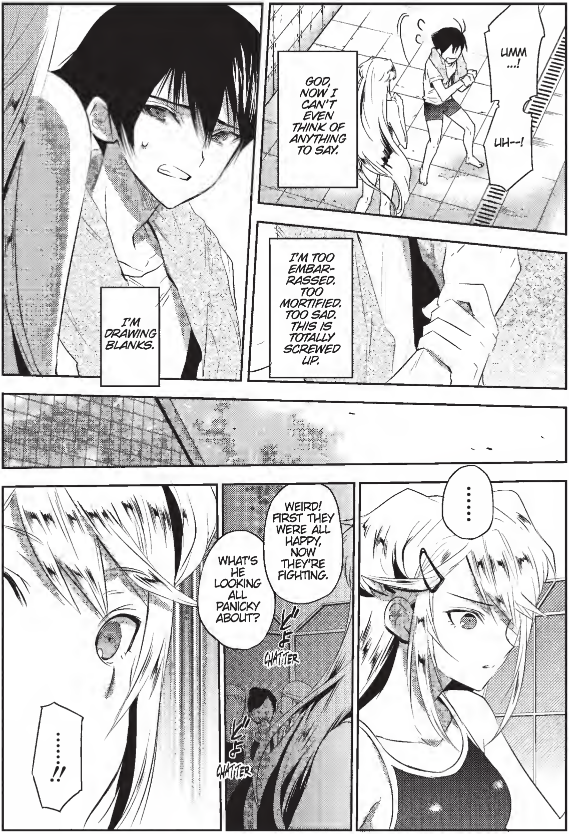
Chapter 2: The Incident

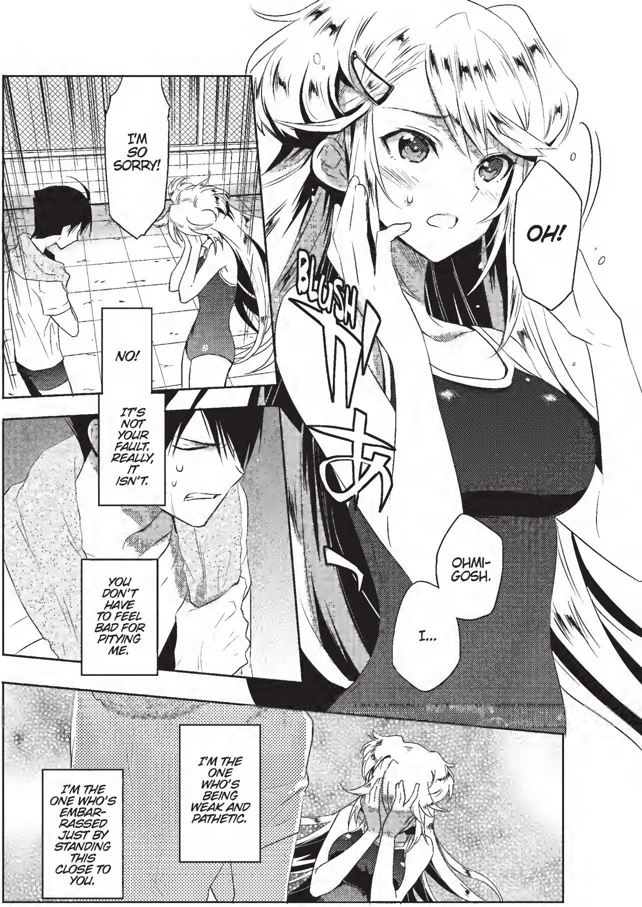

ザワ
YAMMER
ザワ
YAMMER
WH...
WHA...
ドキ
BDMP
WHUT?!
WHAT'S GOING ON?
ドキ
BDMP
AWAYA NIKI PRACTICALLY LIVES IN A DIFFERENT, UNREACHABLE UNIVERSE.
HOW DOES SHE EVEN KNOW I EXIST? WHY WOULD SHE HELP ME?
OH GOD!
ドキ
BDMP
ドキ
BDMP
PSSST
YOU'RE OKAY, NOW.
SHE'S SO CLOSE, I COULD DIE!!
ドキ
BDMP
IS THIS SOME KIND OF DIVINE REWARD FOR BRAVING THE GRUELING, EMBARRASSING 25-METER SWIM?
ドキ
BDMP
COULD IT BE THAT SHE'S ACTUALLY INTERESTED IN ME? DARE I HOPE?
ドキ
BDMP
ドキ
BDMP

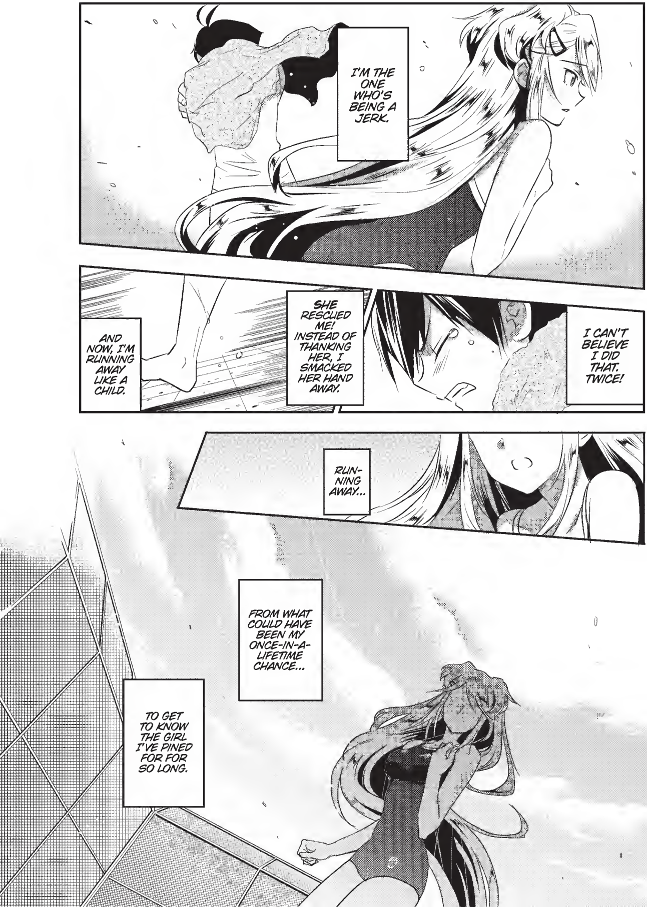

GLANCE
OH.
SO THAT'S WHY.
SHE PITIES ME BECAUSE OF THE SCAR.
SHE DID GET AN EYEFUL OF IT A MINUTE AGO.

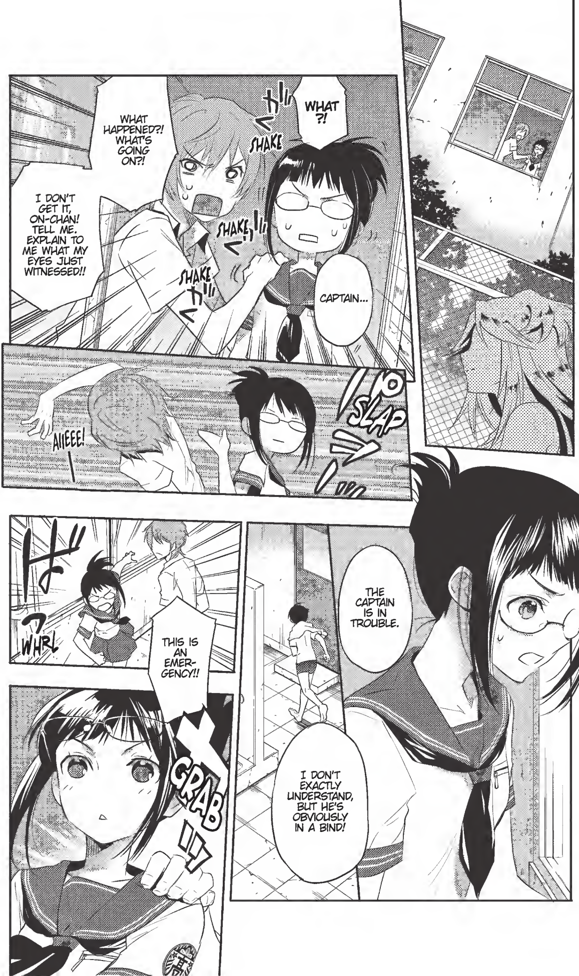

CLUTCH
OF COURSE IT MAKES MORE SENSE THAN MY STUPID FANTASY ACTUALLY HAPPENING.
STUPID. YOU SHOULD'VE THOUGHT OF THAT FIRST, BEFORE GETTING YOUR HOPES UP.
SHE TOOK PITY ON ME AND LENT ME A HAND.
THAT'S ALL.
A FLEETING MOMENT OF MERCY BESTOWED ON A POOR, WIMPY, WUSSY--
GRAB

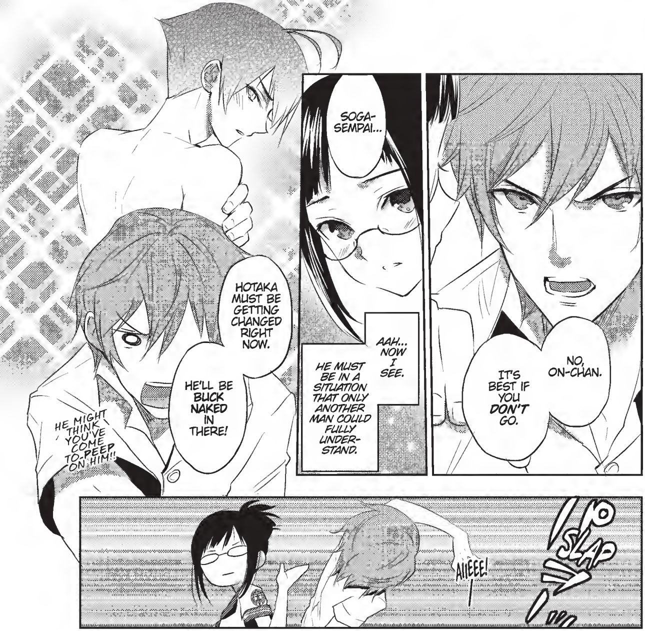

THERE'S A CHANGING ROOM JUST PAST THE SHOWERS.
IF YOU WALK WITH ME LIKE THIS, NO ONE WILL SEE *IT.*
TOO CLOSE... TOO HOT...
WHAP
ACK!
CRAP! I DID IT AGAIN ...!

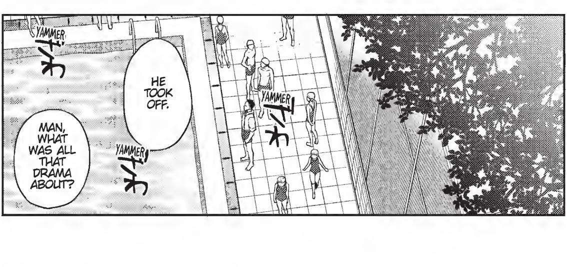

UMM ...!
UH--!
GOD, NOW I CAN'T EVEN THINK OF ANYTHING TO SAY.
I'M TOO EMBARRASSED. TOO MORTIFIED. TOO SAD. THIS IS TOTALLY SCREWED UP.
I'M DRAWING BLANKS.
......
WEIRD! FIRST THEY WERE ALL HAPPY, NOW THEY'RE FIGHTING.
WHAT'S HE LOOKING ALL PANICKY ABOUT?
CHATTER
CHATTER
......!!

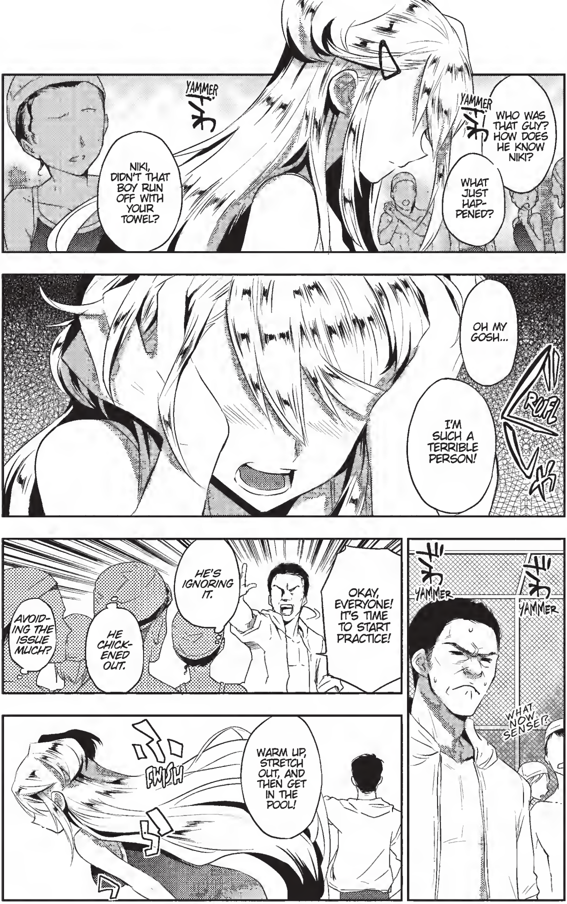

OH!
BLUSH
OHMI-GOSH.
I...
I'M SO SORRY!
NO!
IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT. REALLY, IT ISN'T.
YOU DON'T HAVE TO FEEL BAD FOR PITYING ME.
I'M THE ONE WHO'S BEING WEAK AND PATHETIC.
I'M THE ONE WHO'S EMBARRASSED JUST BY STANDING THIS CLOSE TO YOU.

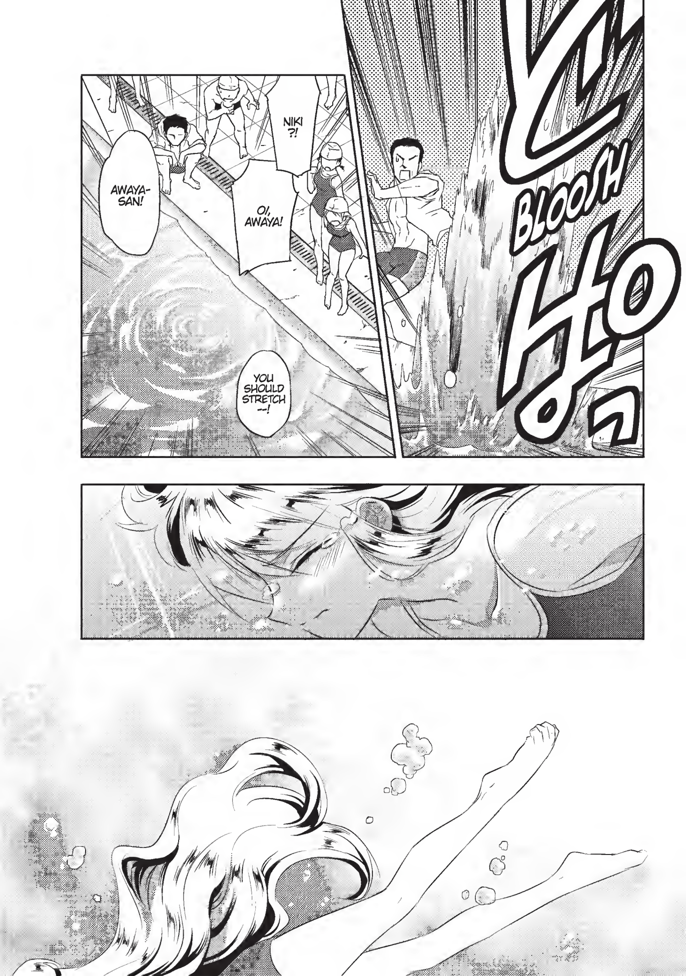

I'M THE ONE WHO'S BEING A JERK.
I CAN'T BELIEVE I DID THAT. TWICE!
SHE RESCUED ME! INSTEAD OF THANKING HER, I SMACKED HER HAND AWAY.
AND NOW, I'M RUNNING AWAY LIKE A CHILD.
RUNNING AWAY...
FROM WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN MY ONCE-IN-A-LIFETIME CHANCE...
TO GET TO KNOW THE GIRL I'VE PINED FOR FOR SO LONG.

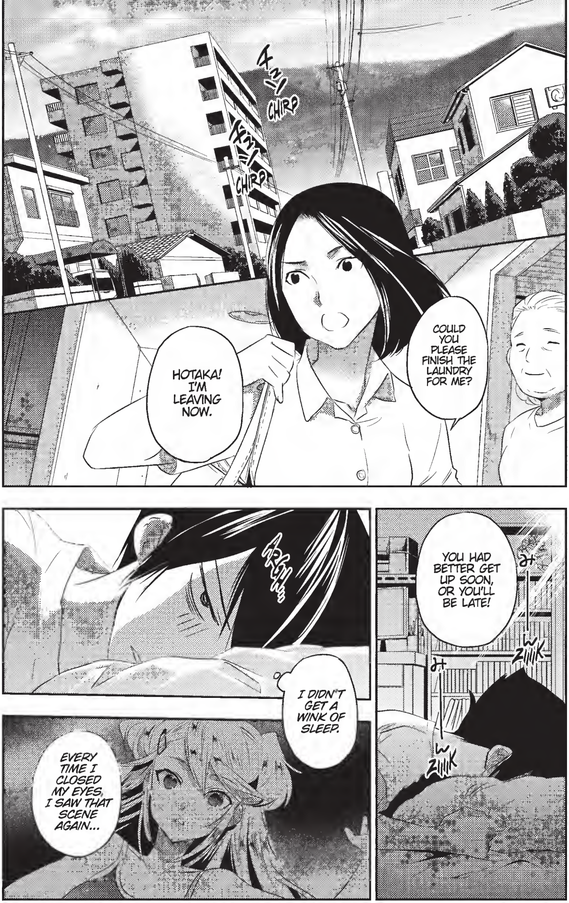

WHAT ?!
SHAKE
WHAT HAPPENED?! WHAT'S GOING ON?!
SHAKE
I DON'T GET IT, ON-CHAN! TELL ME. EXPLAIN TO ME WHAT MY EYES JUST WITNESSED!!
SHAKE
CAPTAIN...
SLAP
AIIEEE!
THE CAPTAIN IS IN TROUBLE.
I DON'T EXACTLY UNDERSTAND, BUT HE'S OBVIOUSLY IN A BIND!
THIS IS AN EMERGENCY!!
WHRL
GRAB

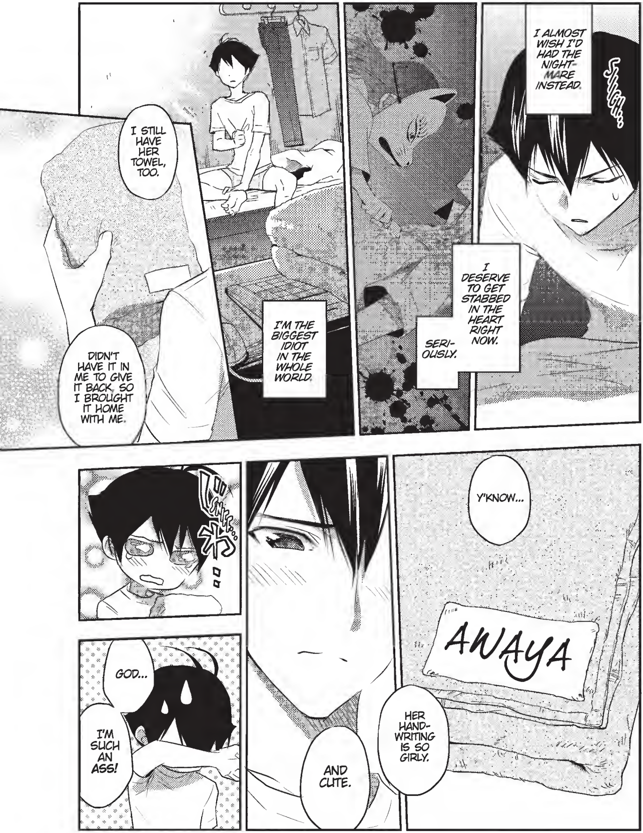

NO, ON-CHAN. IT'S BEST IF YOU DON'T GO.
SOGA-SEMPAI...
AAH... NOW I SEE.
HE MUST BE IN A SITUATION THAT ONLY ANOTHER MAN COULD FULLY UNDERSTAND.
HOTAKA MUST BE GETTING CHANGED RIGHT NOW.
HE'LL BE BUCK NAKED IN THERE!
HE MIGHT THINK YOU'VE COME TO PEEP ON HIM!!
SLAP
AIIEEE!

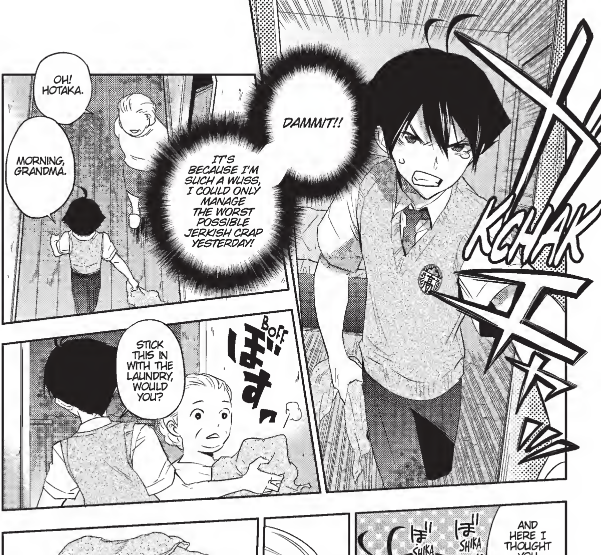

YAMMER
HE TOOK OFF.
YAMMER
MAN, WHAT WAS ALL THAT DRAMA ABOUT?
YAMMER

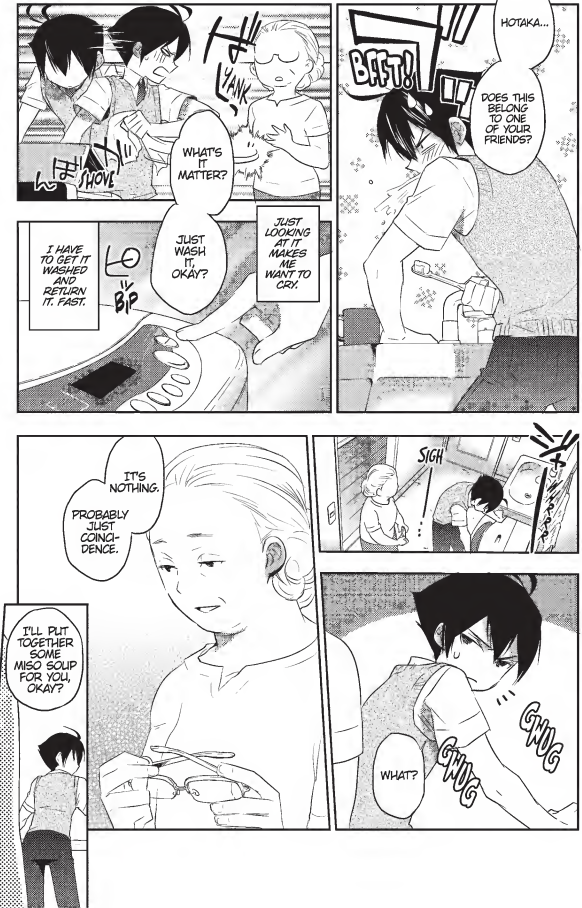

WHO WAS THAT GUY? HOW DOES HE KNOW NIKI?
YAMMER
WHAT JUST HAPPENED?
YAMMER
NIKI, DIDN'T THAT BOY RUN OFF WITH YOUR TOWEL?
OH MY GOSH...
I'M SUCH A TERRIBLE PERSON!
RUFFL
YAMMER
YAMMER
WHAT NOW, SENSEI!?
OKAY, EVERYONE! IT'S TIME TO START PRACTICE!
HE'S IGNORING IT.
HE CHICKENED OUT.
AVOIDING THE ISSUE MUCH?
WARM UP, STRETCH OUT, AND THEN GET IN THE POOL!
FWISH

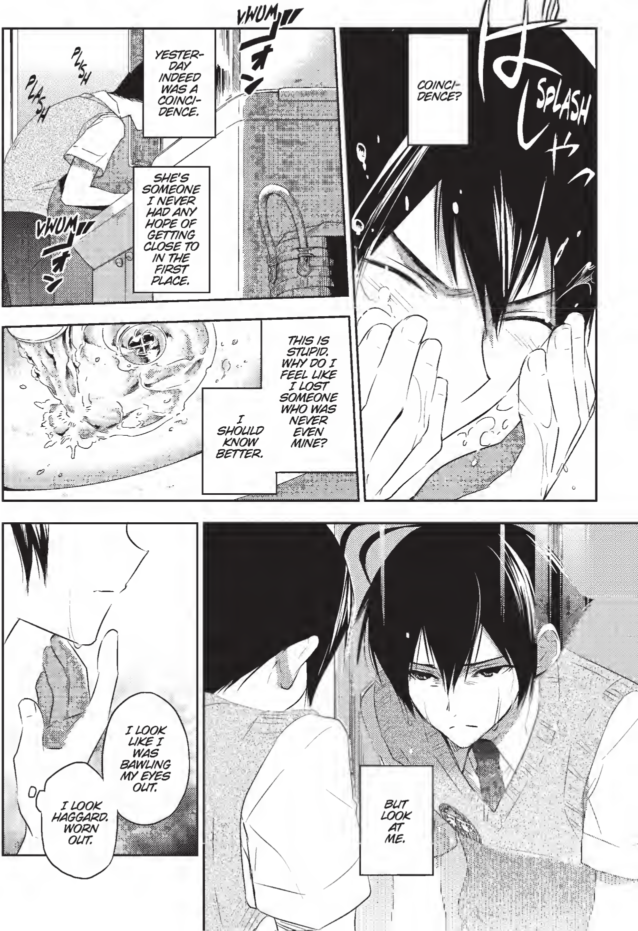

どぱっ
BLOOSH
NIKI ?!
OI, AWAYA!
AWAYA-SAN!
YOU SHOULD STRETCH --!

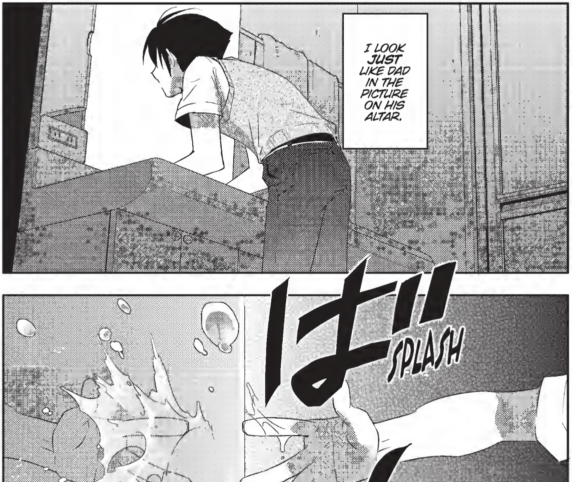

CHIRP
CHIRP
COULD YOU PLEASE FINISH THE LAUNDRY FOR ME?
HOTAKA! I'M LEAVING NOW.
YOU HAD BETTER GET UP SOON, OR YOU'LL BE LATE!
ZIIIK
ZIIIK
ARGH...
I DIDN'T GET A WINK OF SLEEP.
EVERY TIME I CLOSED MY EYES, I SAW THAT SCENE AGAIN...

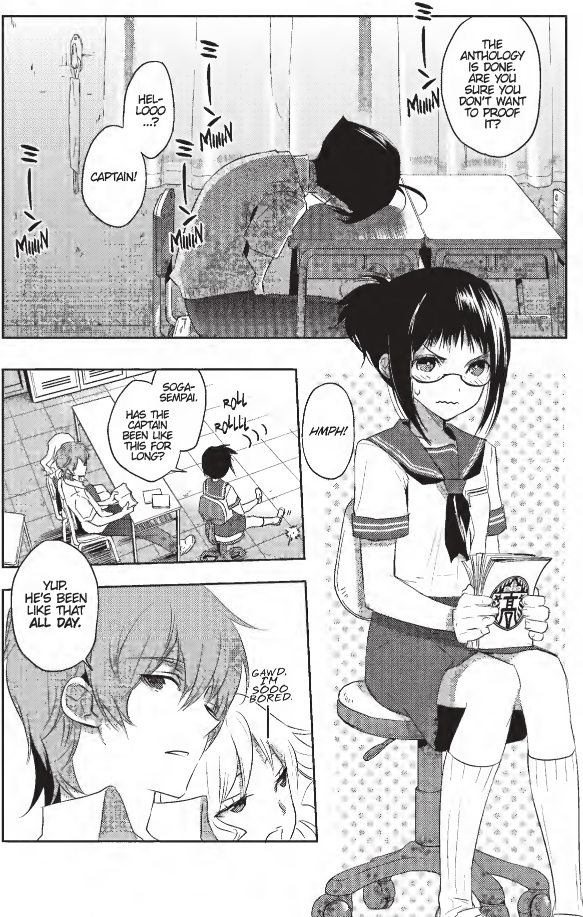

SIGH...
I ALMOST WISH I'D HAD THE NIGHTMARE INSTEAD.
I DESERVE TO GET STABBED IN THE HEART RIGHT NOW.
SERIOUSLY.
I STILL HAVE HER TOWEL, TOO.
I'M THE BIGGEST IDIOT IN THE WHOLE WORLD.
DIDN'T HAVE IT IN ME TO GIVE IT BACK, SO I BROUGHT IT HOME WITH ME.
Y'KNOW...
AWAYA
HER HANDWRITING IS SO GIRLY.
AND CUTE.
GOD...
I'M SUCH AN ASS!

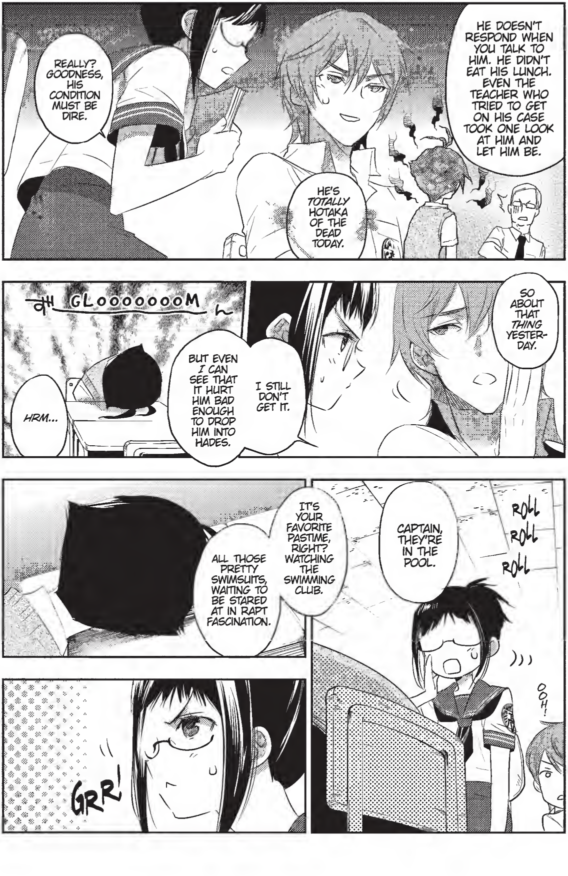

KCHAK
DAMMIT!!
IT'S BECAUSE I'M SUCH A WUSS, I COULD ONLY MANAGE THE WORST POSSIBLE JERKISH CRAP YESTERDAY!
OH! HOTAKA.
MORNING, GRANDMA.
BOFF
ぼすっ
STICK THIS IN WITH THE LAUNDRY, WOULD YOU?
AND HERE I THOUGHT YOU WEREN'T AWAKE YET.
ぼ SHIKA
ぼ SHIKA
ぼ SHIKA
ぼ SHIKA
ぼ SHIKA
......

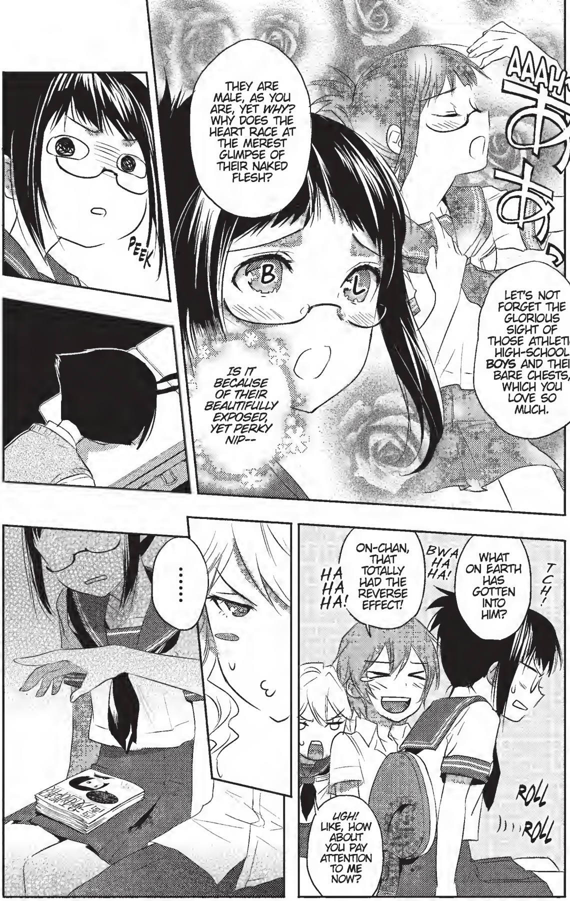

HOTAKA...
DOES THIS BELONG TO ONE OF YOUR FRIENDS?
BFFT!
YANK
SHOVE
WHAT'S IT MATTER?
JUST LOOKING AT IT MAKES ME WANT TO CRY.
JUST WASH IT, OKAY?
BIP
I HAVE TO GET IT WASHED AND RETURN IT. FAST.
WHIRRR
SIGH
GWUG
GWUG
WHAT?
IT'S NOTHING.
PROBABLY JUST COINCIDENCE.
I'LL PUT TOGETHER SOME MISO SOUP FOR YOU, OKAY?

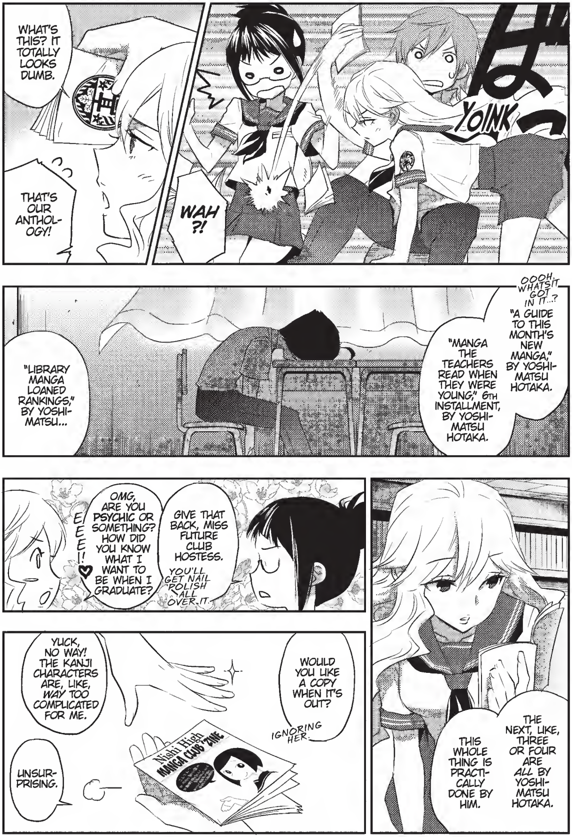

はしゃっ
SPLASH
COINCIDENCE?
VWUM ゴォン
YESTERDAY INDEED WAS A COINCIDENCE.
PLISH
PLASH
SHE'S SOMEONE I NEVER HAD ANY HOPE OF GETTING CLOSE TO IN THE FIRST PLACE.
VWUM ゴォン
THIS IS STUPID. WHY DO I FEEL LIKE I LOST SOMEONE WHO WAS NEVER EVEN MINE?
I SHOULD KNOW BETTER.
BUT LOOK AT ME.
I LOOK LIKE I WAS BAWLING MY EYES OUT.
I LOOK HAGGARD. WORN OUT.

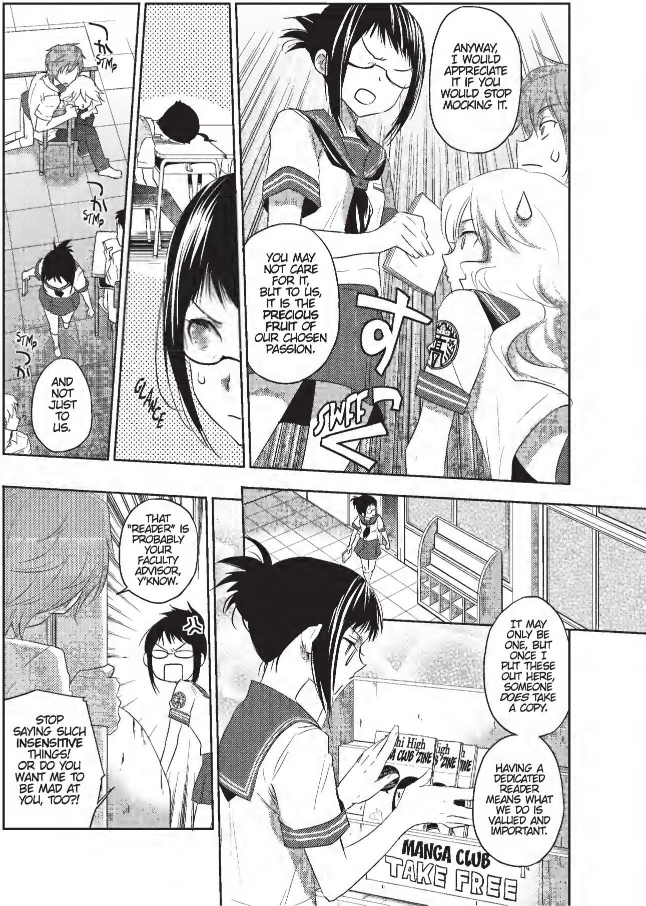

I LOOK **JUST** LIKE DAD IN THE PICTURE ON HIS ALTAR.
ばしゃっ
SPLASH
CAPTAIN.
CAPTAIN!

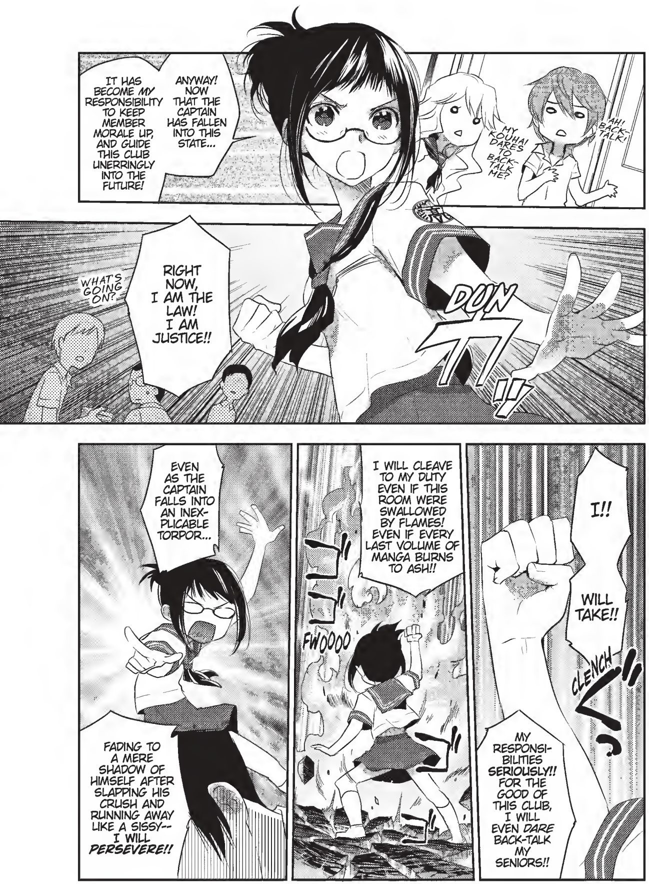

MIIIN
THE ANTHOLOGY IS DONE. ARE YOU SURE YOU DON'T WANT TO PROOF IT?
MIIIN
HEL-LOOO ...?
CAPTAIN!
MIIIN
MIIIN
HMPH!
SOGA-SEMPAI.
HAS THE CAPTAIN BEEN LIKE THIS FOR LONG?
ROLL
ROLLLL
YUP. HE'S BEEN LIKE THAT **ALL DAY.**
GAWD, I'M SOOO BORED.

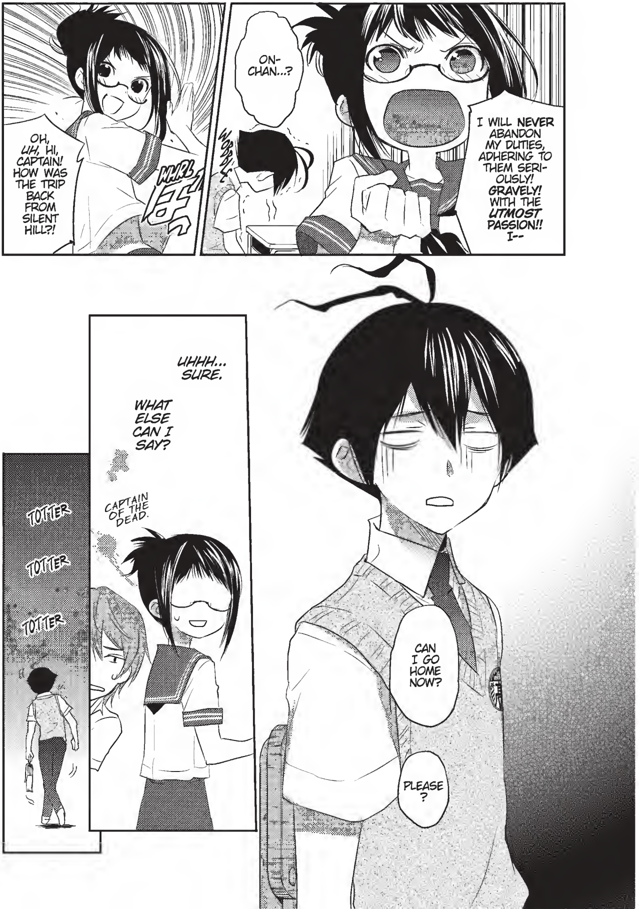

HE DOESN'T RESPOND WHEN YOU TALK TO HIM. HE DIDN'T EAT HIS LUNCH. EVEN THE TEACHER WHO TRIED TO GET ON HIS CASE TOOK ONE LOOK AT HIM AND LET HIM BE.
HE'S *TOTALLY* HOTAKA OF THE DEAD TODAY.
REALLY? GOODNESS, HIS CONDITION MUST BE DIRE.
SO ABOUT THAT *THING* YESTERDAY.
I STILL DON'T GET IT.
BUT EVEN *I* CAN SEE THAT IT HURT HIM BAD ENOUGH TO DROP HIM INTO HADES.
GLOOOOOOOM
HRM...
CAPTAIN, THEY'RE IN THE POOL.
ROLL
ROLL
ROLL
OOH!
IT'S YOUR FAVORITE PASTIME, RIGHT? WATCHING THE SWIMMING CLUB.
ALL THOSE PRETTY SWIMSUITS, WAITING TO BE STARED AT IN RAPT FASCINATION.
GRR!

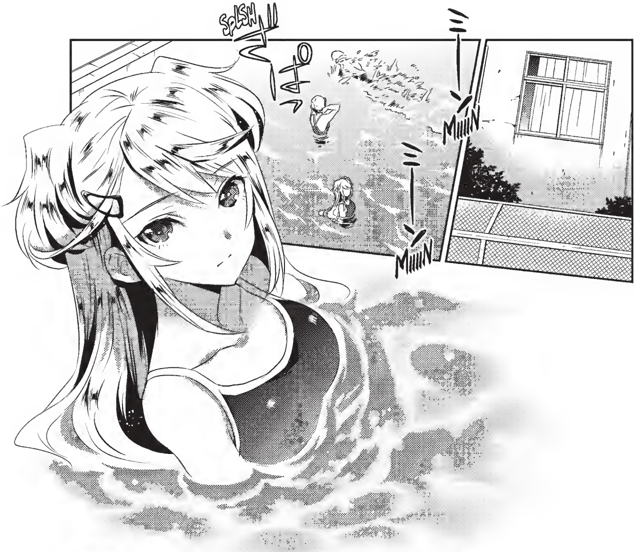

AAAH♪!
あああっ
THEY ARE MALE, AS YOU ARE, YET *WHY*? WHY DOES THE HEART RACE AT THE MEREST GLIMPSE OF THEIR NAKED FLESH?
LET'S NOT FORGET THE GLORIOUS SIGHT OF THOSE ATHLETIC HIGH-SCHOOL **BOYS** AND THEIR BARE CHESTS, WHICH YOU LOVE SO MUCH.
B L
IS IT BECAUSE OF THEIR BEAUTIFULLY EXPOSED, YET PERKY NIP--
PEEK
TCH!
WHAT ON EARTH HAS GOTTEN INTO HIM?
BWA HA HA!
ON-CHAN, THAT TOTALLY HAD THE REVERSE EFFECT!
HA HA HA!
ROLL
ROLL
UGH! LIKE, HOW ABOUT YOU PAY ATTENTION TO **ME** NOW?
......

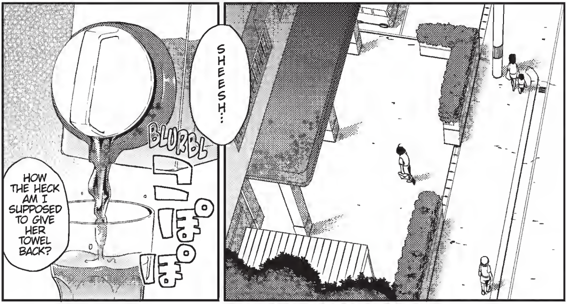

ばっ
YOINK
WAH?!
WHAT'S THIS? IT TOTALLY LOOKS DUMB.
THAT'S OUR ANTHOLOGY!
OOOH, WHATSIT GOT IN IT...?
"A GUIDE TO THIS MONTH'S NEW MANGA," BY YOSHIMATSU HOTAKA.
"MANGA THE TEACHERS READ WHEN THEY WERE YOUNG," 6TH INSTALLMENT, BY YOSHIMATSU HOTAKA.
"LIBRARY MANGA LOANED RANKINGS," BY YOSHIMATSU...
THE NEXT, LIKE, THREE OR FOUR ARE ALL BY YOSHIMATSU HOTAKA.
THIS WHOLE THING IS PRACTICALLY DONE BY HIM.
GIVE THAT BACK, MISS FUTURE CLUB HOSTESS.
YOU'LL GET NAIL POLISH ALL OVER IT.
OMG, ARE YOU PSYCHIC OR SOMETHING? HOW DID YOU KNOW WHAT I WANT TO BE WHEN I GRADUATE?
EEE!♥
WOULD YOU LIKE A COPY WHEN IT'S OUT?
IGNORING HER.
YUCK, NO WAY! THE KANJI CHARACTERS ARE, LIKE, WAY TOO COMPLICATED FOR ME.
UNSURPRISING.
Nishi High
MANGA CLUB 'ZINE

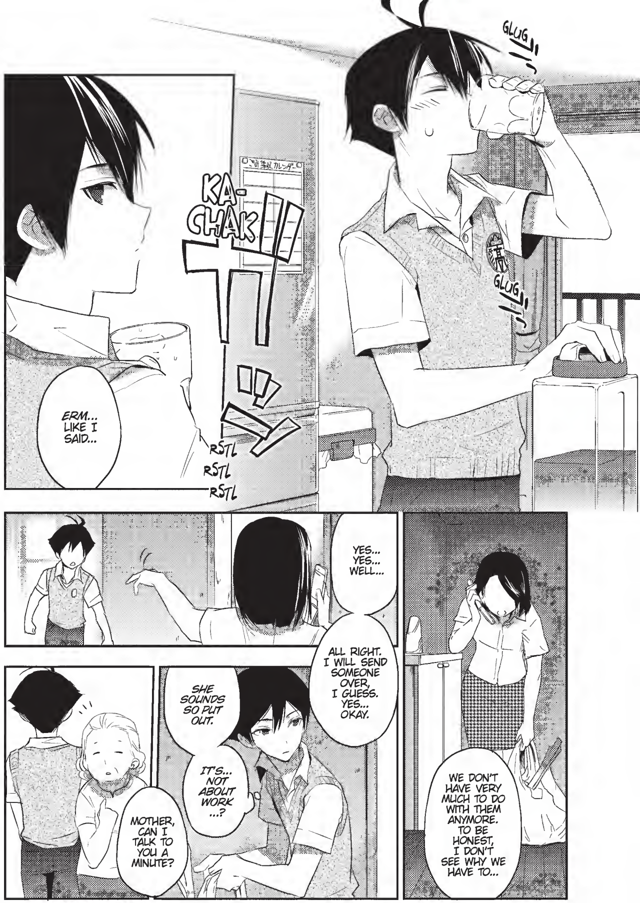

ANYWAY, I WOULD APPRECIATE IT IF YOU WOULD STOP MOCKING IT.
YOU MAY NOT CARE FOR IT, BUT TO US, IT IS THE **PRECIOUS FRUIT** OF OUR CHOSEN PASSION.
す
SWFF
GLANCE
つか STMP
つか STMP
STMP つか
AND NOT JUST TO US.
IT MAY ONLY BE ONE, BUT ONCE I PUT THESE OUT HERE, SOMEONE *DOES* TAKE A COPY.
HAVING A DEDICATED READER MEANS WHAT WE DO IS VALUED AND IMPORTANT.
hi High
A CLUB 'ZINE
igh
'ZINE
MANGA CLUB
TAKE FREE
THAT "READER" IS PROBABLY YOUR FACULTY ADVISOR, Y'KNOW.
STOP SAYING SUCH INSENSITIVE THINGS! OR DO YOU WANT ME TO BE MAD AT YOU, TOO?!

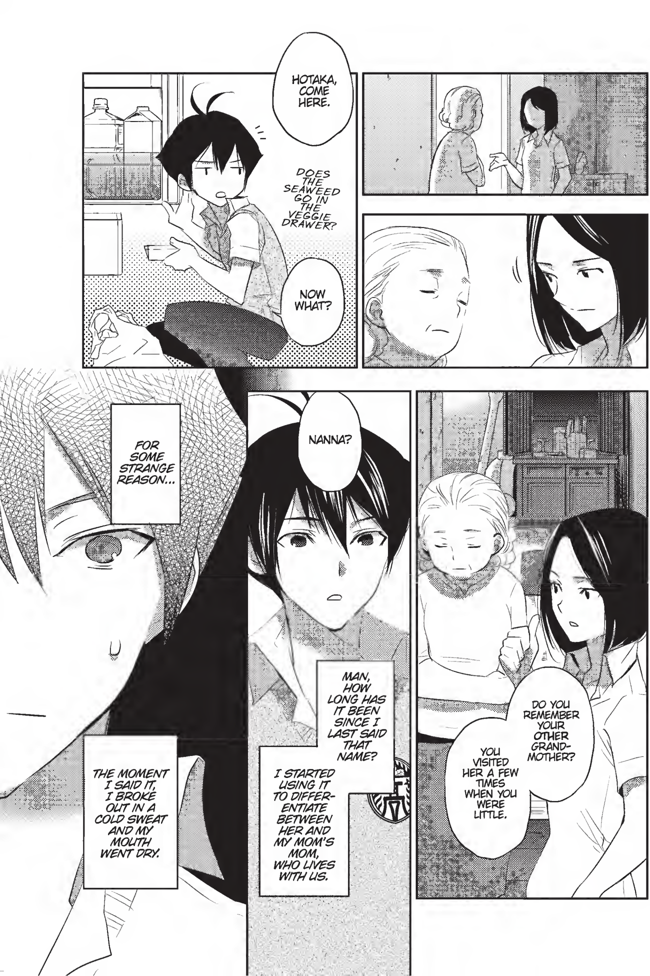

AH! BACK-TALK!
MY KOUHAI DARES TO BACK-TALK ME?
ANYWAY! NOW THAT THE CAPTAIN HAS FALLEN INTO THIS STATE...
IT HAS BECOME MY RESPONSIBILITY TO KEEP MEMBER MORALE UP, AND GUIDE THIS CLUB UNERRINGLY INTO THE FUTURE!
DUN
RIGHT NOW, I AM THE LAW! I AM JUSTICE!!
WHAT'S GOING ON?
I!!
WILL TAKE!!
CLENCH
MY RESPONSIBILITIES SERIOUSLY!! FOR THE GOOD OF THIS CLUB, I WILL EVEN DARE BACK-TALK MY SENIORS!!
I WILL CLEAVE TO MY DUTY EVEN IF THIS ROOM WERE SWALLOWED BY FLAMES! EVEN IF EVERY LAST VOLUME OF MANGA BURNS TO ASH!!
FWOOOO
EVEN AS THE CAPTAIN FALLS INTO AN INEXPLICABLE TORPOR...
FADING TO A MERE SHADOW OF HIMSELF AFTER SLAPPING HIS CRUSH AND RUNNING AWAY LIKE A SISSY-- I WILL PERSEVERE!!

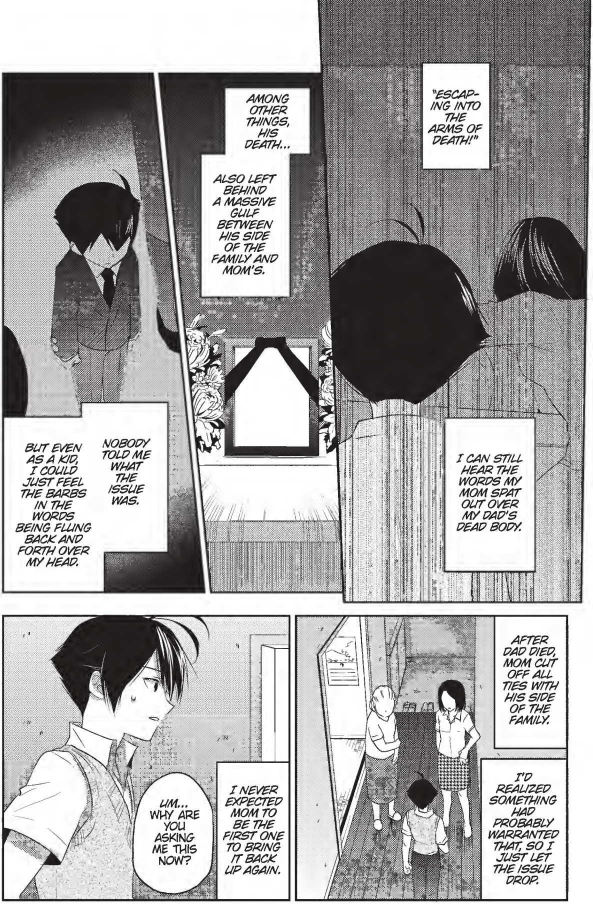

I WILL NEVER ABANDON MY DUTIES, ADHERING TO THEM SERIOUSLY! GRAVELY! WITH THE UTMOST PASSION!! I--
ON-CHAN...?
WOBBLE
WHIRL
OH, UH, HI, CAPTAIN! HOW WAS THE TRIP BACK FROM SILENT HILL?!
CAN I GO HOME NOW?
PLEASE?
UHHH... SURE.
WHAT ELSE CAN I SAY?
CAPTAIN OF THE DEAD.
TOTTER
TOTTER
TOTTER

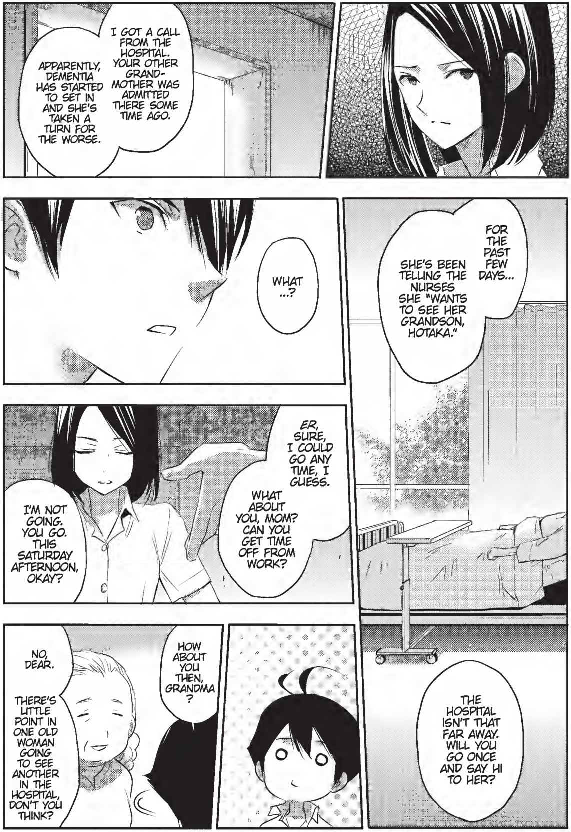

MIIIN
MIIIN
SPLSH!!

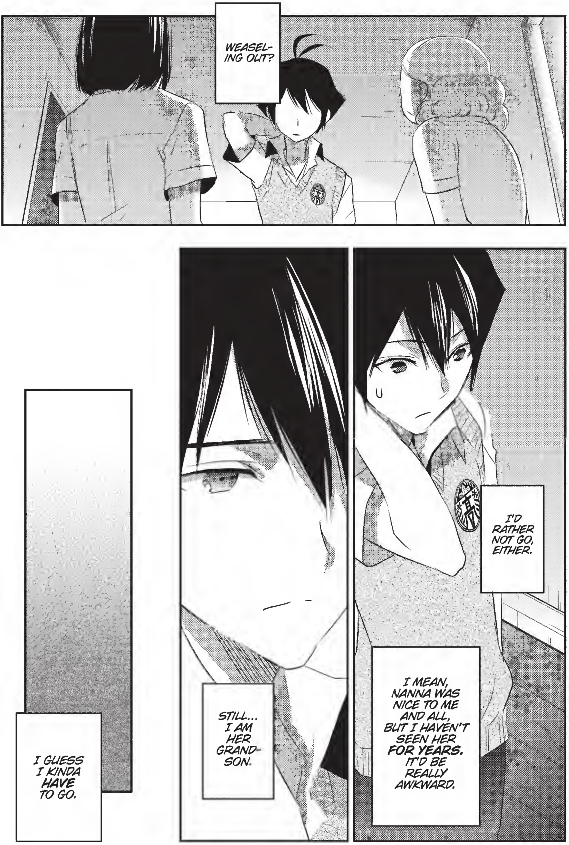

SHEESH...
BLURBL
HOW THE HECK AM I SUPPOSED TO GIVE HER TOWEL BACK?

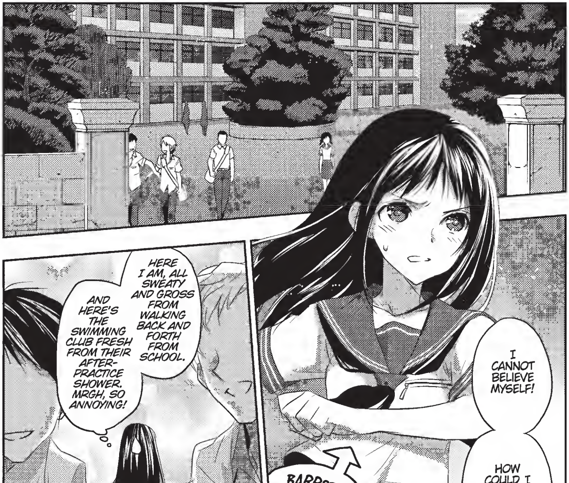

GLUG
GLUG
KA-CHAK
RSTL
RSTL
RSTL
ERM... LIKE I SAID...
YES... YES... WELL...
WE DON'T HAVE VERY MUCH TO DO WITH THEM ANYMORE. TO BE HONEST, I DON'T SEE WHY WE HAVE TO...
ALL RIGHT. I WILL SEND SOMEONE OVER, I GUESS. YES... OKAY.
SHE SOUNDS SO PUT OUT.
IT'S... NOT ABOUT WORK...?
MOTHER, CAN I TALK TO YOU A MINUTE?

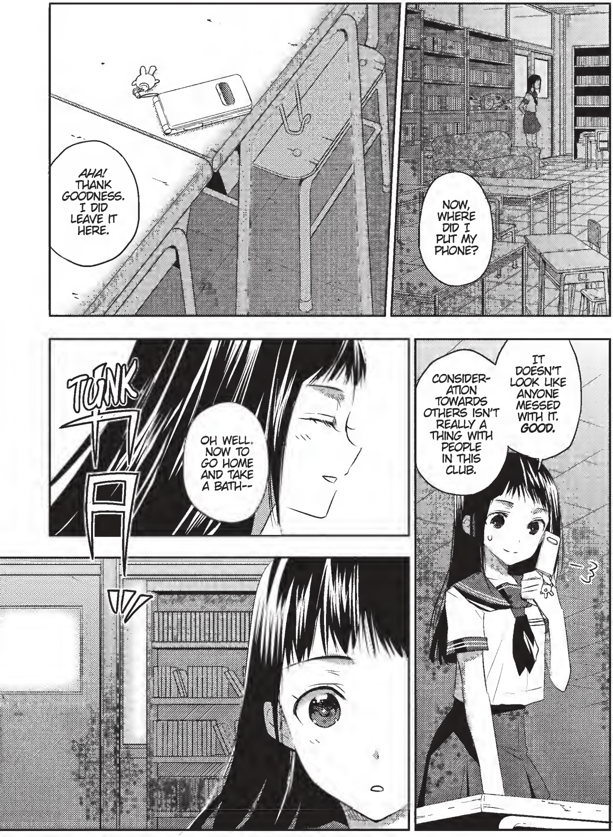

HOTAKA, COME HERE.
DOES THE SEAWEED GO IN THE VEGGIE DRAWER?
NOW WHAT?
DO YOU REMEMBER YOUR OTHER GRANDMOTHER?
YOU VISITED HER A FEW TIMES WHEN YOU WERE LITTLE.
NANNA?
MAN, HOW LONG HAS IT BEEN SINCE I LAST SAID THAT NAME?
I STARTED USING IT TO DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN HER AND MY MOM'S MOM, WHO LIVES WITH US.
FOR SOME STRANGE REASON...
THE MOMENT I SAID IT, I BROKE OUT IN A COLD SWEAT AND MY MOUTH WENT DRY.

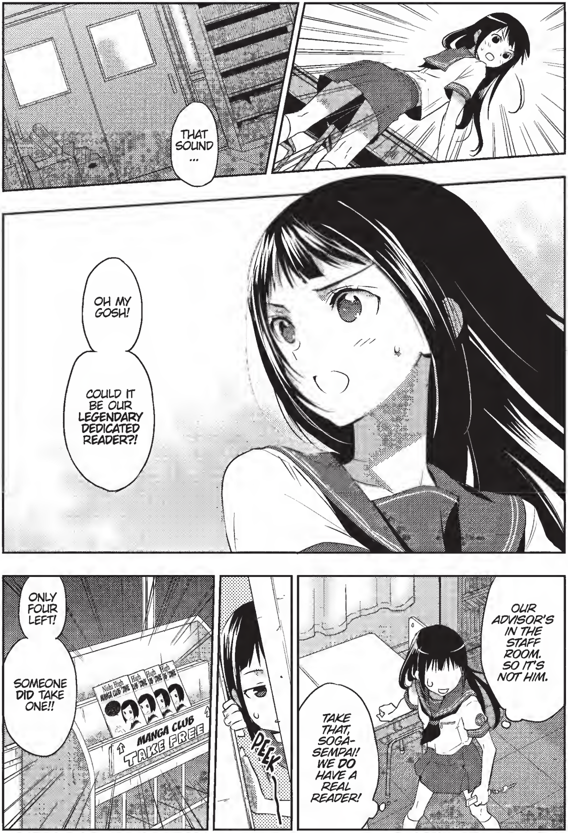

I CAN STILL HEAR THE WORDS MY MOM SPAT OUT OVER MY DAD'S DEAD BODY.
"ESCAPING INTO THE ARMS OF DEATH!"
AMONG OTHER THINGS, HIS DEATH...
ALSO LEFT BEHIND A MASSIVE GULF BETWEEN HIS SIDE OF THE FAMILY AND MOM'S.
NOBODY TOLD ME WHAT THE ISSUE WAS.
BUT EVEN AS A KID, I COULD JUST FEEL THE BARBS IN THE WORDS BEING FLUNG BACK AND FORTH OVER MY HEAD.
AFTER DAD DIED, MOM CUT OFF ALL TIES WITH HIS SIDE OF THE FAMILY.
I'D REALIZED SOMETHING HAD PROBABLY WARRANTED THAT, SO I JUST LET THE ISSUE DROP.
I NEVER EXPECTED MOM TO BE THE FIRST ONE TO BRING IT BACK UP AGAIN.
UM... WHY ARE YOU ASKING ME THIS NOW?

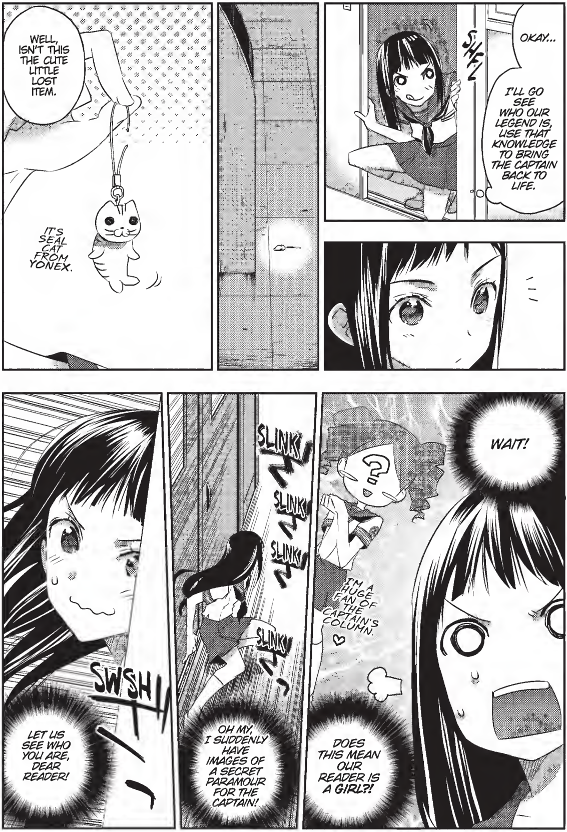

I GOT A CALL FROM THE HOSPITAL. YOUR OTHER GRANDMOTHER WAS ADMITTED THERE SOME TIME AGO.
APPARENTLY, DEMENTIA HAS STARTED TO SET IN AND SHE'S TAKEN A TURN FOR THE WORSE.
FOR THE PAST FEW DAYS...
SHE'S BEEN TELLING THE NURSES SHE "WANTS TO SEE HER GRANDSON, HOTAKA."
WHAT ...?
THE HOSPITAL ISN'T THAT FAR AWAY. WILL YOU GO ONCE AND SAY HI TO HER?
ER, SURE, I COULD GO ANY TIME, I GUESS.
WHAT ABOUT YOU, MOM? CAN YOU GET TIME OFF FROM WORK?
I'M NOT GOING. YOU GO. THIS SATURDAY AFTERNOON, OKAY?
HOW ABOUT YOU THEN, GRANDMA?
NO, DEAR.
THERE'S LITTLE POINT IN ONE OLD WOMAN GOING TO SEE ANOTHER IN THE HOSPITAL, DON'T YOU THINK?

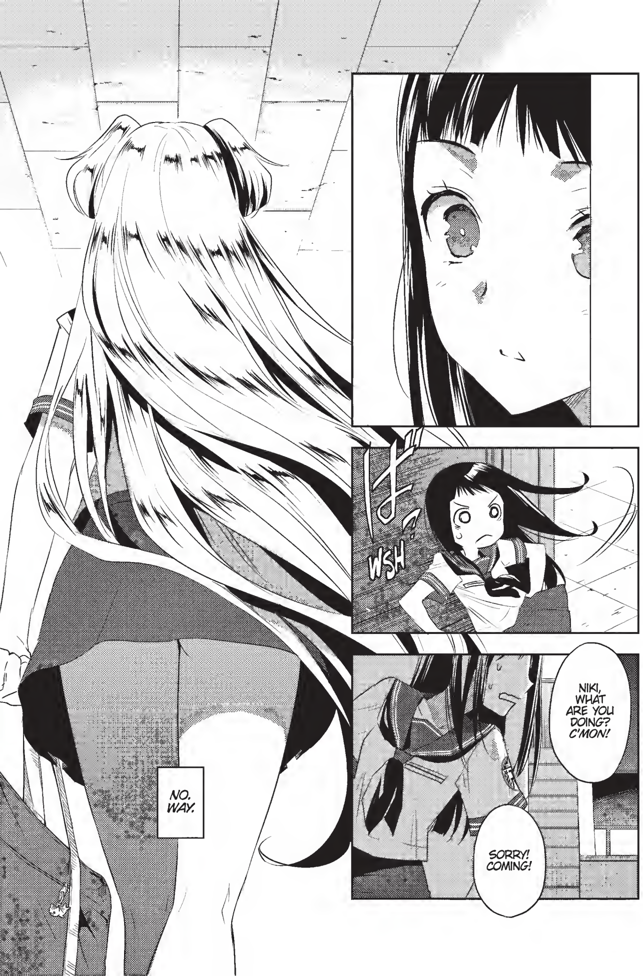

WEASELING OUT?
I'D RATHER NOT GO, EITHER.
I MEAN, NANNA WAS NICE TO ME AND ALL, BUT I HAVEN'T SEEN HER **FOR YEARS.** IT'D BE REALLY AWKWARD.
STILL… I AM HER GRANDSON.
I GUESS I KINDA **HAVE** TO GO.

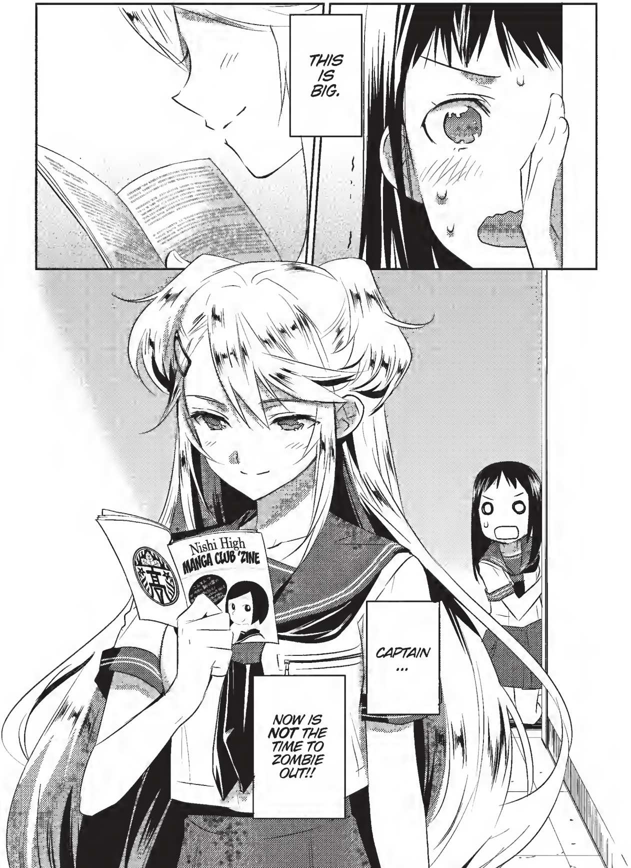

I CANNOT BELIEVE MYSELF!
HOW COULD I FORGET MY CELL PHONE AT SCHOOL?!
BARRETTE off.
HERE I AM, ALL SWEATY AND GROSS FROM WALKING BACK AND FORTH FROM SCHOOL.
AND HERE'S THE SWIMMING CLUB FRESH FROM THEIR AFTER-PRACTICE SHOWER. MRGH, SO ANNOYING!
STMP
STMP
RATTLE ガチャ
RATTLE ガチャ
MANGA CLUB TAKE FREE
STILL FIVE THERE.

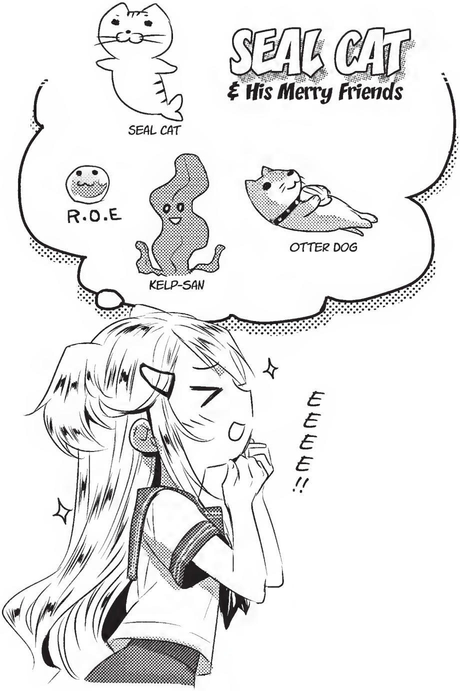

NOW, WHERE DID I PUT MY PHONE?
AHA! THANK GOODNESS. I DID LEAVE IT HERE.
IT DOESN'T LOOK LIKE ANYONE MESSED WITH IT. **GOOD.**
CONSIDERATION TOWARDS OTHERS ISN'T REALLY A THING WITH PEOPLE IN THIS CLUB.
OH WELL. NOW TO GO HOME AND TAKE A BATH--
TUNK

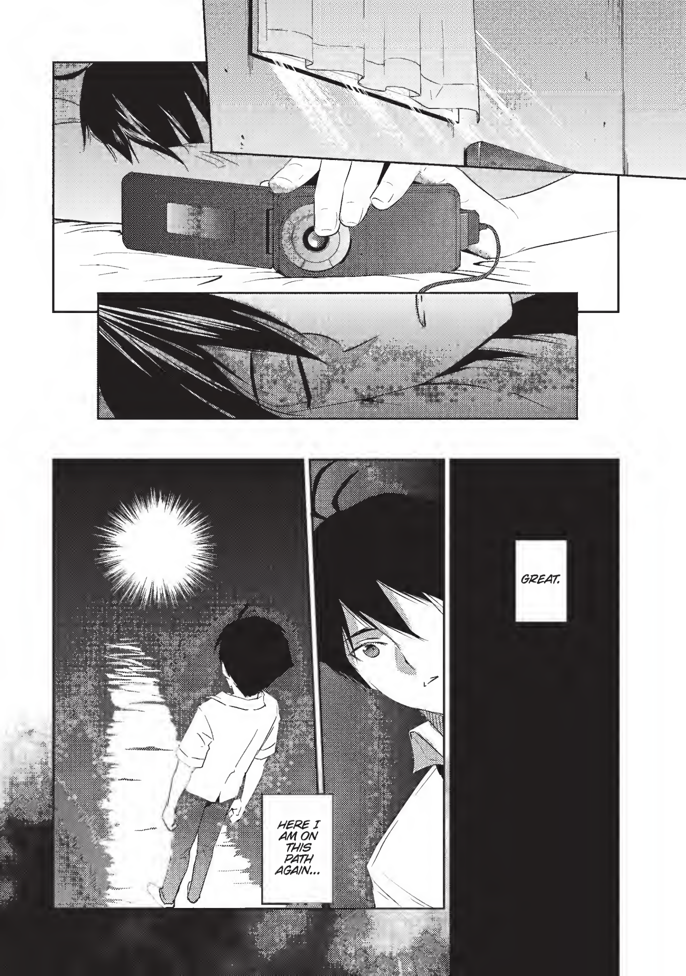

THAT SOUND ...
OH MY GOSH!
COULD IT BE OUR LEGENDARY DEDICATED READER?!
OUR ADVISOR'S IN THE STAFF ROOM. SO IT'S NOT HIM.
TAKE THAT, SOGA-SEMPAI! WE DO HAVE A REAL READER!
PEEK
ONLY FOUR LEFT!
SOMEONE DID TAKE ONE!!
Nishi High MANGA CLUB 'ZINE
MANGA CLUB TAKE FREE

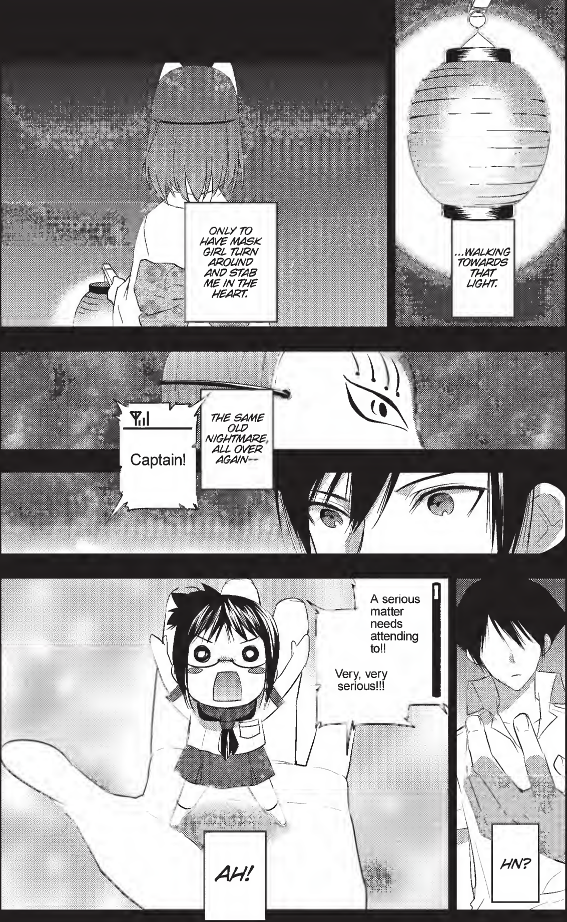

OKAY...
I'LL GO SEE WHO OUR LEGEND IS, USE THAT KNOWLEDGE TO BRING THE CAPTAIN BACK TO LIFE.
SHFL
WELL, ISN'T THIS THE CUTE LITTLE LOST ITEM.
IT'S SEAL CAT FROM YONEX.
WAIT!
I'M A HUGE FAN OF THE CAPTAIN'S COLUMN.
DOES THIS MEAN OUR READER IS A GIRL?!
SLINK
SLINK
SLINK
SLINK
OH MY, I SUDDENLY HAVE IMAGES OF A SECRET PARAMOUR FOR THE CAPTAIN!
SWSH
LET US SEE WHO YOU ARE, DEAR READER!

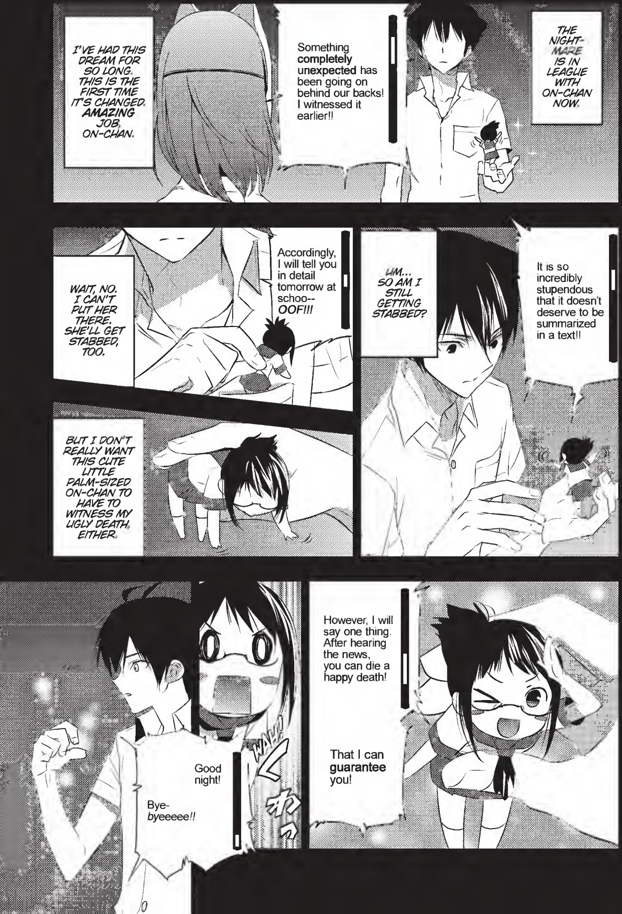

ばっ
WSH
NIKI, WHAT ARE YOU DOING? C'MON!
SORRY! COMING!
NO. WAY.

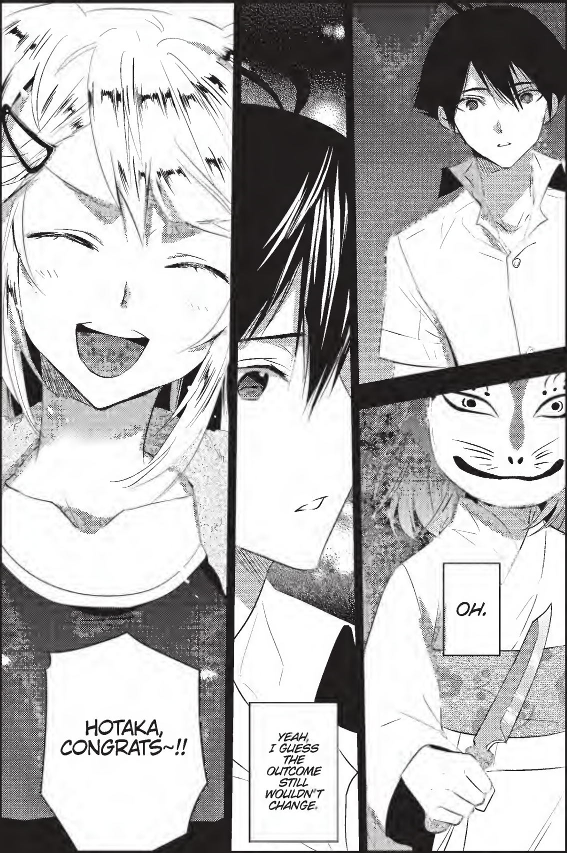

THIS IS BIG.
Nishi High
MANGA CLUB 'ZINE
CAPTAIN ...
NOW IS NOT THE TIME TO ZOMBIE OUT!!

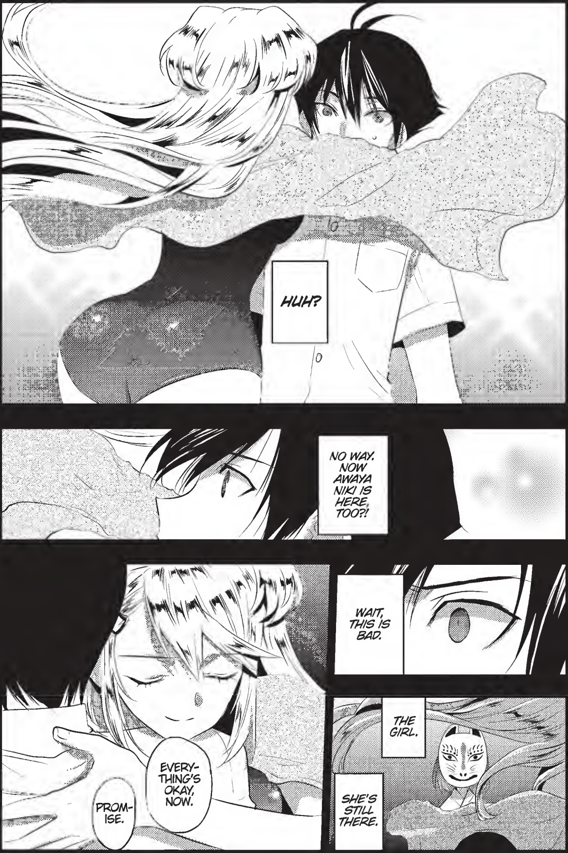

SEAL CAT
& His Merry Friends
SEAL CAT
OTTER DOG
KELP-SAN
R.O.E
EEEE!!

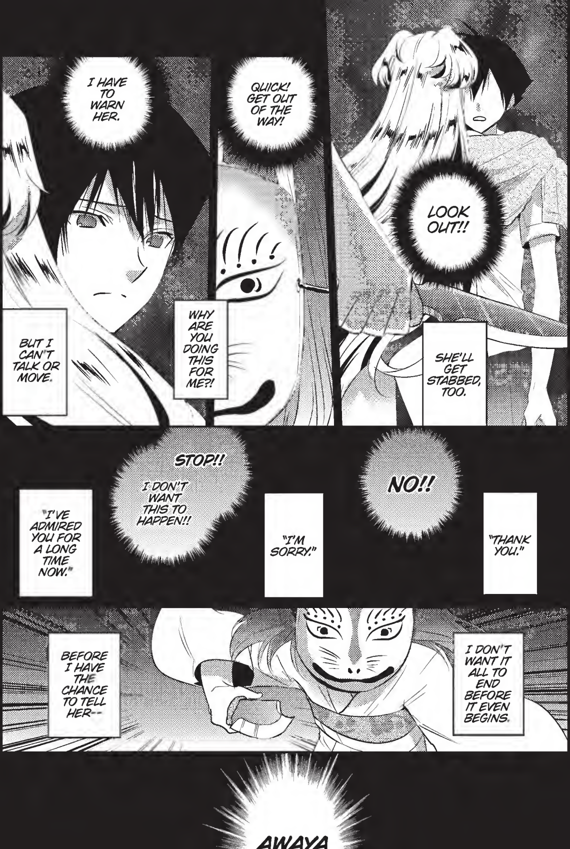

GREAT.
HERE I AM ON THIS PATH AGAIN...

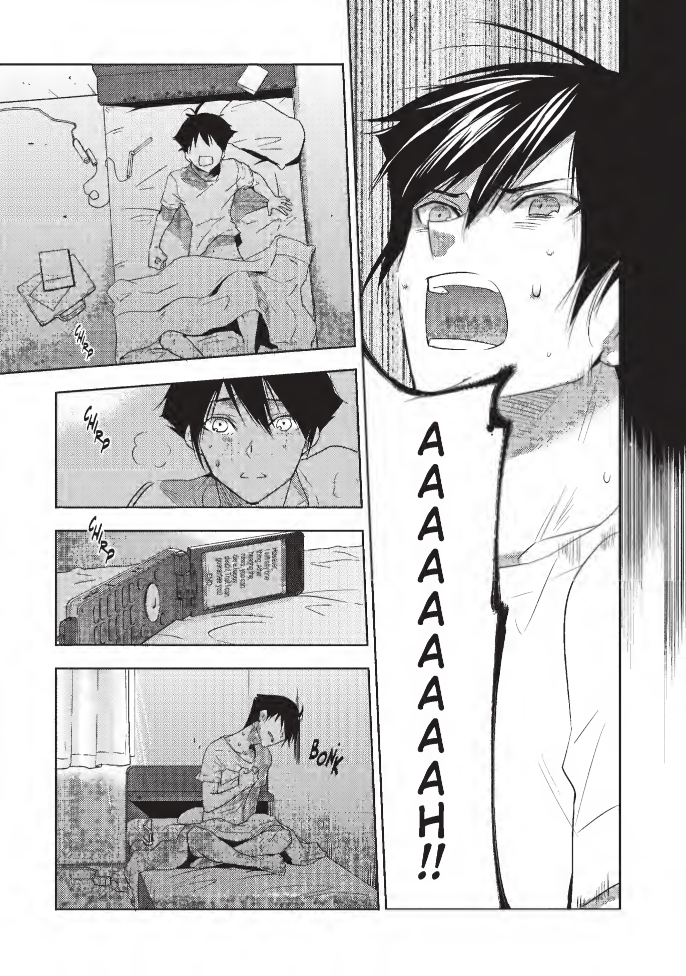

...WALKING TOWARDS THAT LIGHT.
ONLY TO HAVE MASK GIRL TURN AROUND AND STAB ME IN THE HEART.
THE SAME OLD NIGHTMARE, ALL OVER AGAIN—
Captain!
HN?
A serious matter needs attending to!!
Very, very serious!!!
AH!


THE NIGHTMARE IS IN LEAGUE WITH ON-CHAN NOW.
Something completely unexpected has been going on behind our backs! I witnessed it earlier!!
I'VE HAD THIS DREAM FOR SO LONG. THIS IS THE FIRST TIME IT'S CHANGED. AMAZING JOB, ON-CHAN.
It is so incredibly stupendous that it doesn't deserve to be summarized in a text!!
UM... SO AM I STILL GETTING STABBED?
Accordingly, I will tell you in detail tomorrow at schoo-- OOF!!!
WAIT, NO. I CAN'T PUT HER THERE. SHE'LL GET STABBED, TOO.
BUT I DON'T REALLY WANT THIS CUTE LITTLE PALM-SIZED ON-CHAN TO HAVE TO WITNESS MY UGLY DEATH, EITHER.
However, I will say one thing. After hearing the news, you can die a happy death!
That I can guarantee you!
WAH!
Good night!
Bye-byeeeee!!

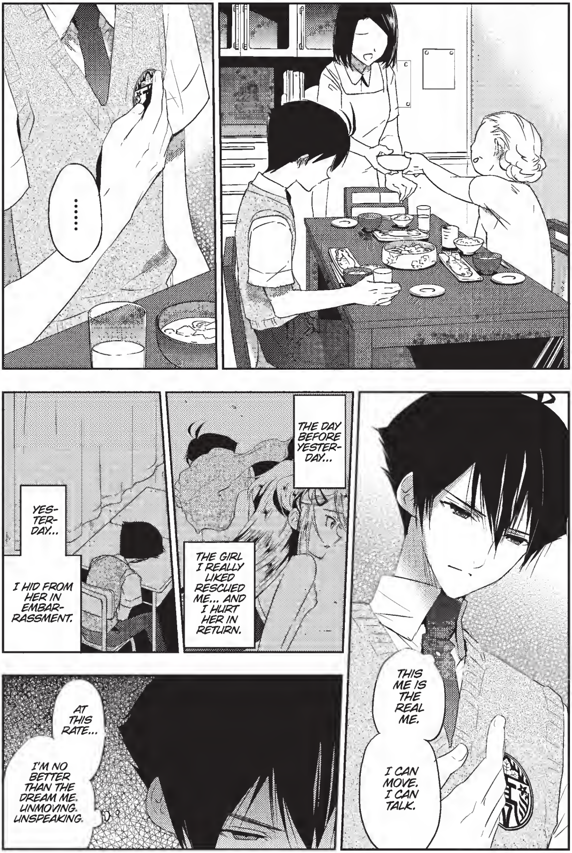

OH.
YEAH, I GUESS THE OUTCOME STILL WOULDN'T CHANGE.
HOTAKA, CONGRATS~!!

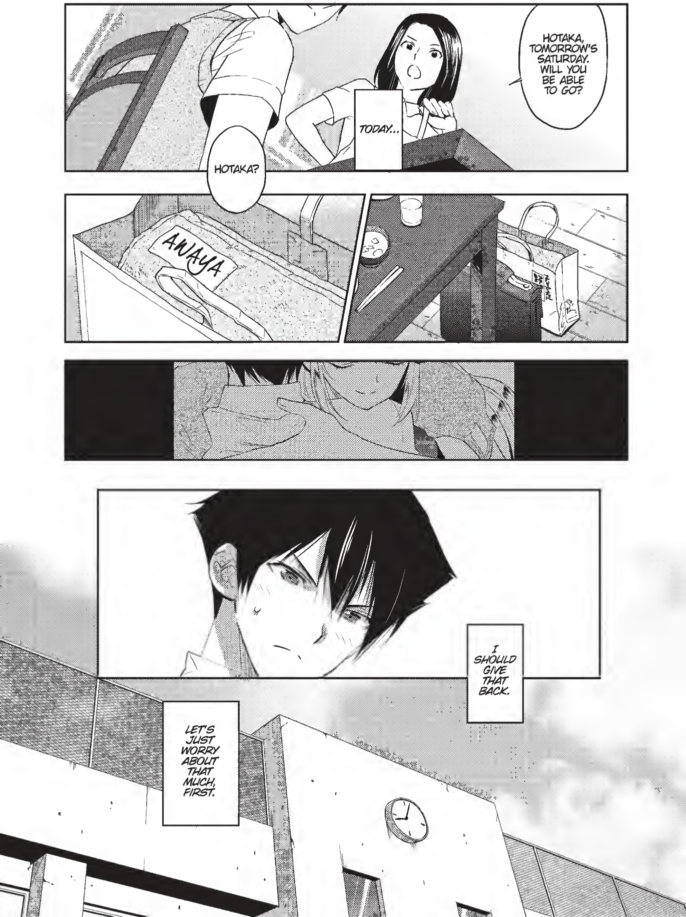

HUH?
NO WAY. NOW AWAYA NIKI IS HERE, TOO?!
WAIT, THIS IS BAD.
THE GIRL.
SHE'S STILL THERE.
EVERYTHING'S OKAY, NOW.
PROMISE.

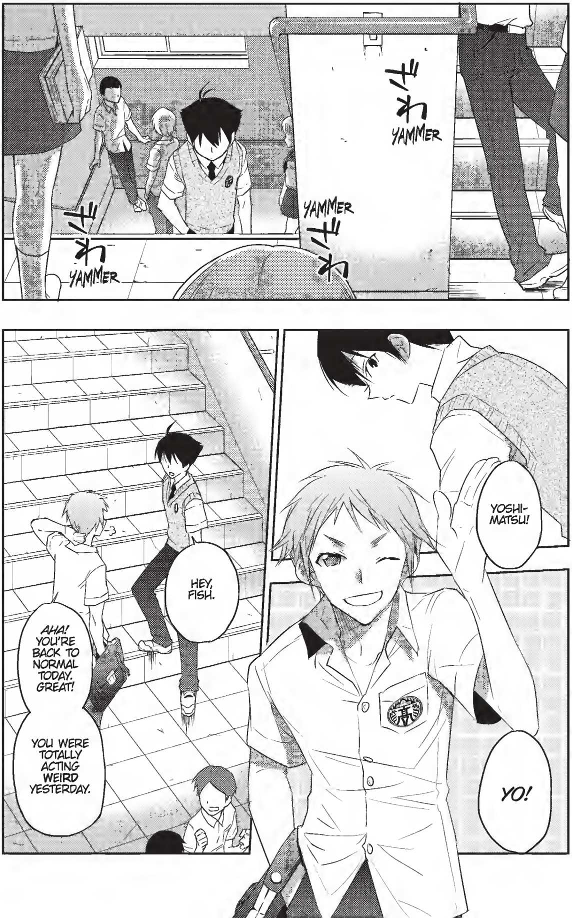

I HAVE TO WARN HER.
BUT I CAN'T TALK OR MOVE.
QUICK! GET OUT OF THE WAY!
WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS FOR ME?!
LOOK OUT!!
SHE'LL GET STABBED, TOO.
"I'VE ADMIRED YOU FOR A LONG TIME NOW."
STOP!!
I DON'T WANT THIS TO HAPPEN!!
"I'M SORRY."
NO!!
"THANK YOU."
BEFORE I HAVE THE CHANCE TO TELL HER--
I DON'T WANT IT ALL TO END BEFORE IT EVEN BEGINS.
AWAYA NIKI!!

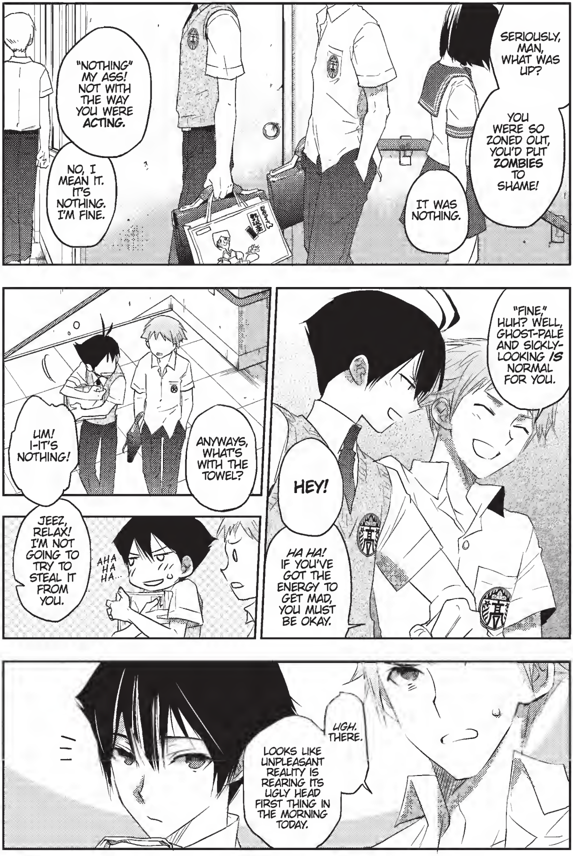

AAAAAAAAAAH!!
CHIRP
CHIRP
CHIRP
However, I will say one thing. After hearing the news, you can die a happy death. That I can guarantee you!
—END—
BONK

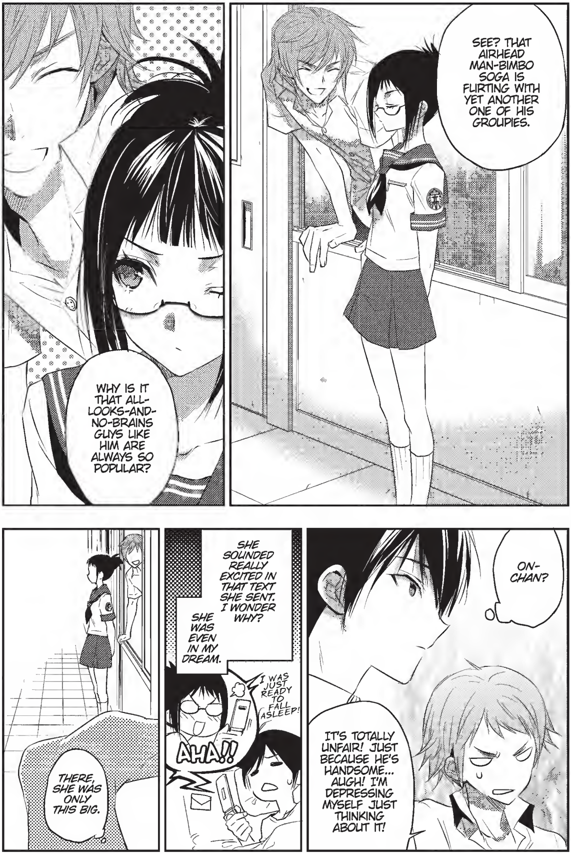
Chapter 3: Lunch Recess Excitement

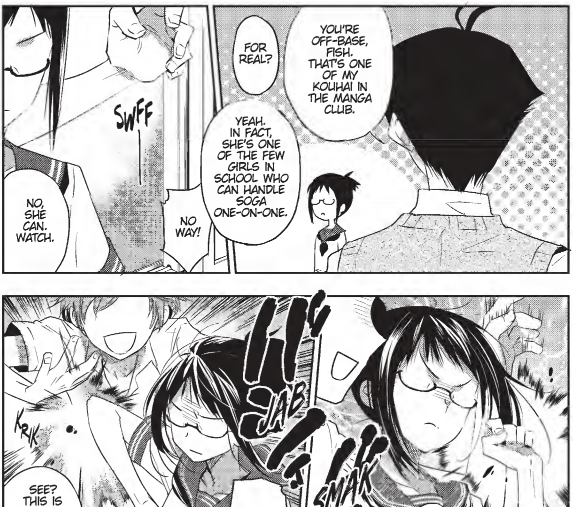

……
THE DAY BEFORE YESTERDAY...
THE GIRL I REALLY LIKED RESCUED ME... AND I HURT HER IN RETURN.
YESTERDAY...
I HID FROM HER IN EMBARRASSMENT.
THIS ME IS THE REAL ME.
I CAN MOVE. I CAN TALK.
AT THIS RATE...
I'M NO BETTER THAN THE DREAM ME. UNMOVING. UNSPEAKING.

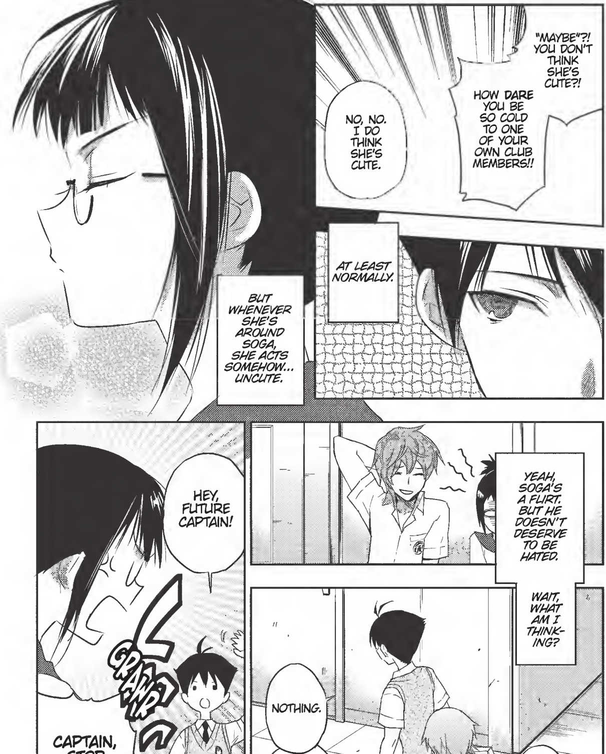

HOTAKA, TOMORROW'S SATURDAY. WILL YOU BE ABLE TO GO?
TODAY...
HOTAKA?
AWAYA
I SHOULD GIVE THAT BACK.
LET'S JUST WORRY ABOUT THAT MUCH, FIRST.

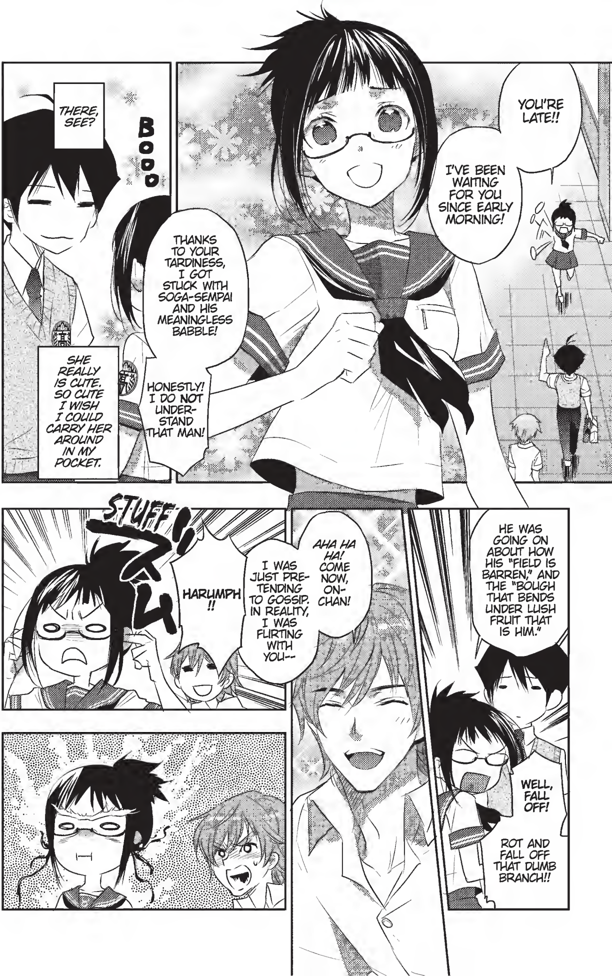

ざわ
YAMMER
YAMMER
ざわ
ざわ
YAMMER
YOSHI-MATSU!
YO!
HEY, FISH.
AHA! YOU'RE BACK TO NORMAL TODAY. GREAT!
YOU WERE TOTALLY ACTING **WEIRD** YESTERDAY.

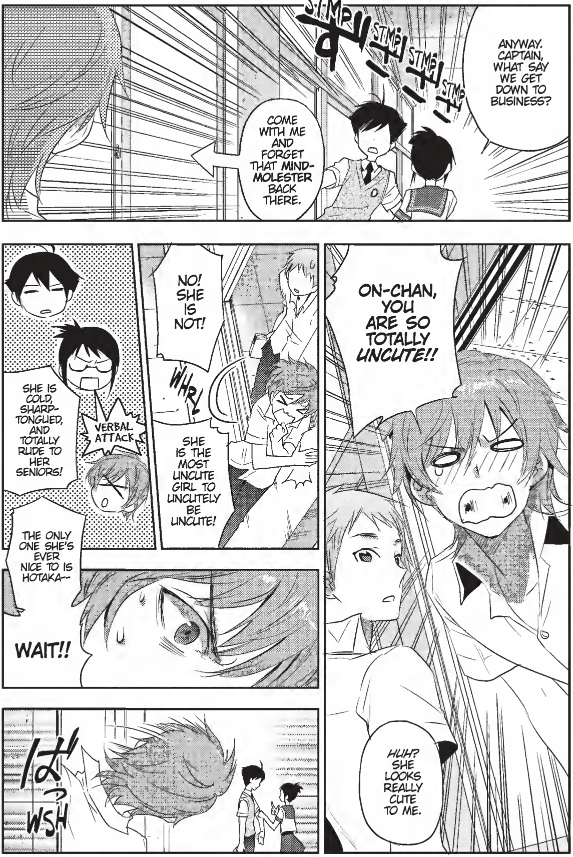

SERIOUSLY, MAN, WHAT WAS UP?
YOU WERE SO ZONED OUT, YOU'D PUT **ZOMBIES** TO SHAME!
IT WAS NOTHING.
"NOTHING" MY ASS! NOT WITH THE WAY YOU WERE **ACTING.**
NO, I MEAN IT. IT'S NOTHING. I'M FINE.
"FINE," HUH? WELL, GHOST-PALE AND SICKLY-LOOKING ***IS*** NORMAL FOR YOU.
HEY!
HA HA! IF YOU'VE GOT THE ENERGY TO GET MAD, YOU MUST BE OKAY.
ANYWAYS, WHAT'S WITH THE TOWEL?
UM! I-IT'S NOTHING!
AHA HA HA...
JEEZ, RELAX! I'M NOT GOING TO TRY TO STEAL IT FROM YOU.
UGH. THERE.
LOOKS LIKE UNPLEASANT REALITY IS REARING ITS UGLY HEAD FIRST THING IN THE MORNING TODAY.

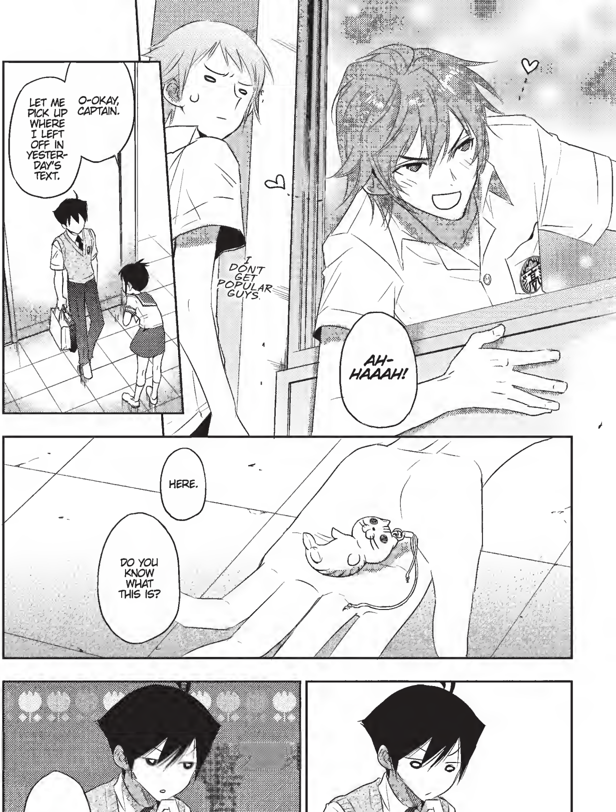

SEE? THAT AIRHEAD MAN-BIMBO SOGA IS FLIRTING WITH YET ANOTHER ONE OF HIS GROUPIES.
WHY IS IT THAT ALL-LOOKS-AND-NO-BRAINS GUYS LIKE HIM ARE ALWAYS SO POPULAR?
ON-CHAN?
IT'S TOTALLY UNFAIR! JUST BECAUSE HE'S HANDSOME... AUGH! I'M DEPRESSING MYSELF JUST THINKING ABOUT IT!
SHE SOUNDED REALLY EXCITED IN THAT TEXT SHE SENT. I WONDER WHY?
SHE WAS EVEN IN MY DREAM.
I WAS JUST READY TO FALL ASLEEP!
AHA!!
THERE, SHE WAS ONLY THIS BIG.

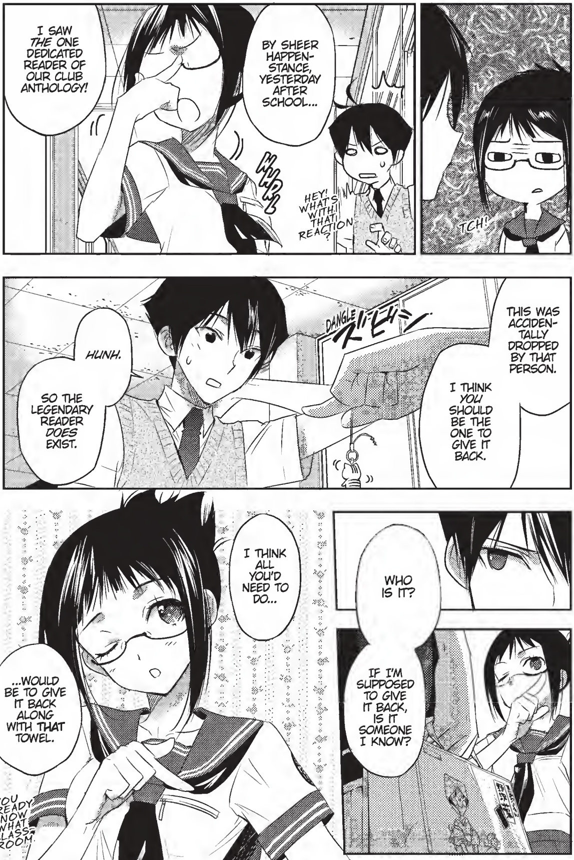

YOU'RE OFF-BASE, FISH. THAT'S ONE OF MY KOUHAI IN THE MANGA CLUB.
FOR REAL?
YEAH. IN FACT, SHE'S ONE OF THE FEW GIRLS IN SCHOOL WHO CAN HANDLE SOGA ONE-ON-ONE.
NO WAY!
SWFF
NO, SHE CAN. WATCH.
WHOA!
SMAK
JAB
BRAVO, GIRL!
KRIK
SEE? THIS IS JUST A PREVIEW OF *THE LEGEND OF ON-CHAN.*
SO HER NAME'S ON-CHAN?
HN?
Y'KNOW, THAT'S... KINDA *CUTE*, ACTUALLY.
I BET SHE'D BE REALLY HOT SANS GLASSES, TOO.
MAYBE.

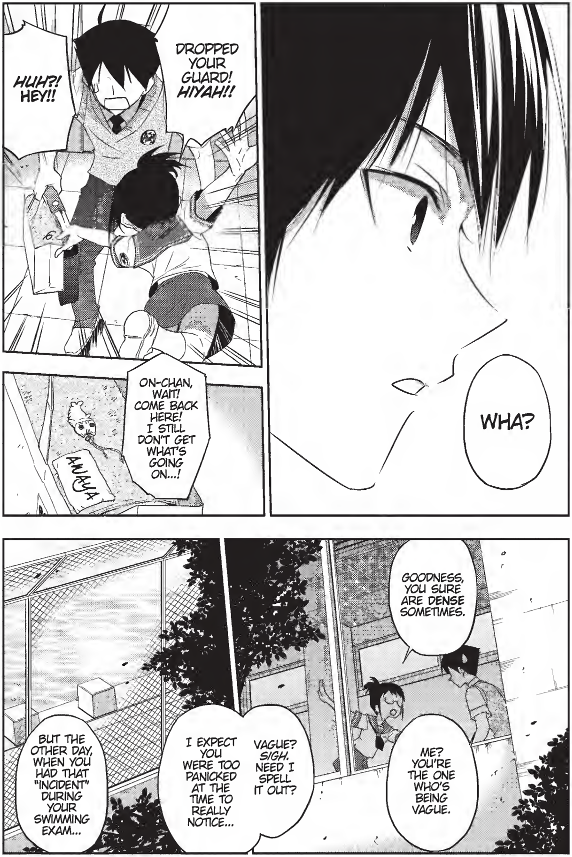

"MAYBE"?! YOU DON'T THINK SHE'S CUTE?!
HOW DARE YOU BE SO COLD TO ONE OF YOUR OWN CLUB MEMBERS!!
NO, NO. I DO THINK SHE'S CUTE.
AT LEAST NORMALLY.
BUT WHENEVER SHE'S AROUND SOGA, SHE ACTS SOMEHOW... UNCUTE.
YEAH, SOGA'S A FLIRT. BUT HE DOESN'T DESERVE TO BE HATED.
WAIT, WHAT AM I THINKING?
WHAT IS IT, YOSHIMATSU?
NOTHING.
"NOTHING" AGAIN. YOU SURE ARE HIDING A LOT.
HEY, FUTURE CAPTAIN!
GRAWR
CAPTAIN, STOP CALLING ME THAT, PLEASE!

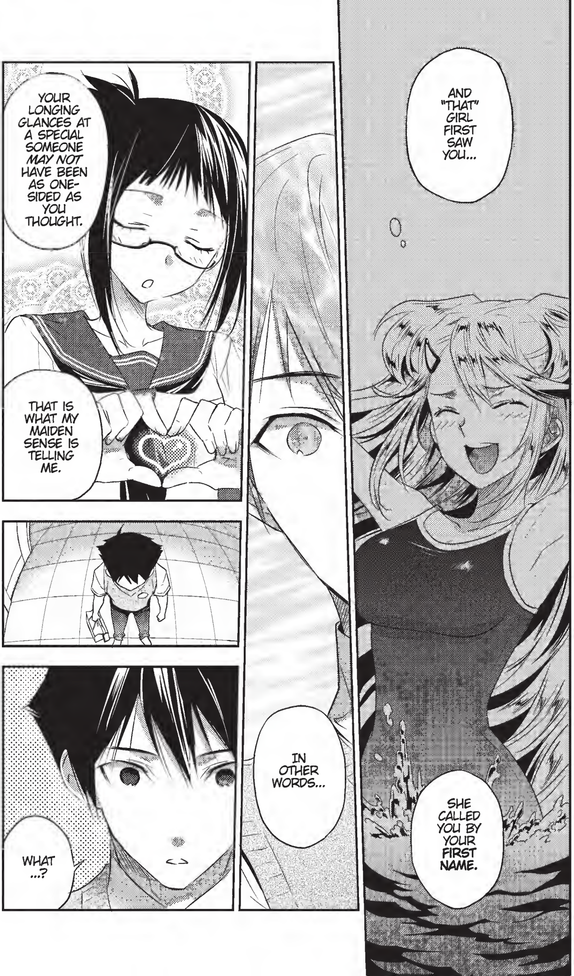

YOU'RE LATE!!
I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR YOU SINCE EARLY MORNING!
THANKS TO YOUR TARDINESS, I GOT STUCK WITH SOGA-SEMPAI AND HIS MEANINGLESS BABBLE!
HONESTLY! I DO NOT UNDERSTAND THAT MAN!
THERE, SEE?
BOOO
SHE REALLY IS CUTE. SO CUTE I WISH I COULD CARRY HER AROUND IN MY POCKET.
HE WAS GOING ON ABOUT HOW HIS "FIELD IS BARREN," AND THE "BOUGH THAT BENDS UNDER LUSH FRUIT THAT IS HIM."
WELL, FALL OFF!
ROT AND FALL OFF THAT DUMB BRANCH!!
AHA HA HA! COME NOW, ON-CHAN!
I WAS JUST PRETENDING TO GOSSIP. IN REALITY, I WAS FLIRTING WITH YOU--
HARUMPH!!
STUFF

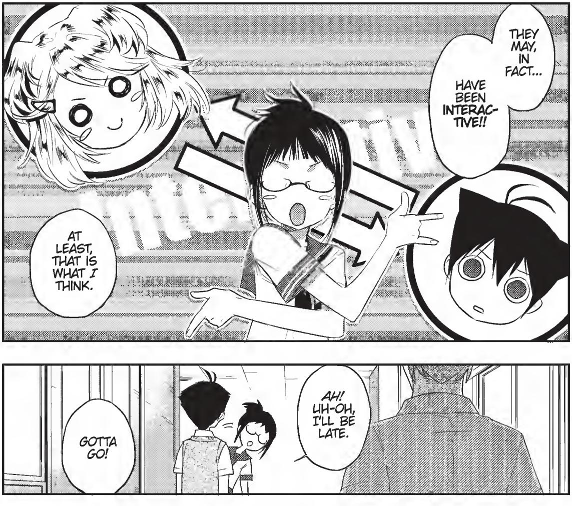

ANYWAY. CAPTAIN, WHAT SAY WE GET DOWN TO BUSINESS?
STMP! STMP! STMP! STMP
COME WITH ME AND FORGET THAT MIND-MOLESTER BACK THERE.
ON-CHAN, YOU ARE SO TOTALLY UNCUTE!!
HUH? SHE LOOKS REALLY CUTE TO ME.
NO! SHE IS NOT!
WHRL
SHE IS THE MOST UNCUTE GIRL TO UNCUTELY BE UNCUTE!
SHE IS COLD, SHARP-TONGUED, AND TOTALLY RUDE TO HER SENIORS!
VERBAL ATTACK
THE ONLY ONE SHE'S EVER NICE TO IS HOTAKA--
WAIT!!
ぱっ
WSH

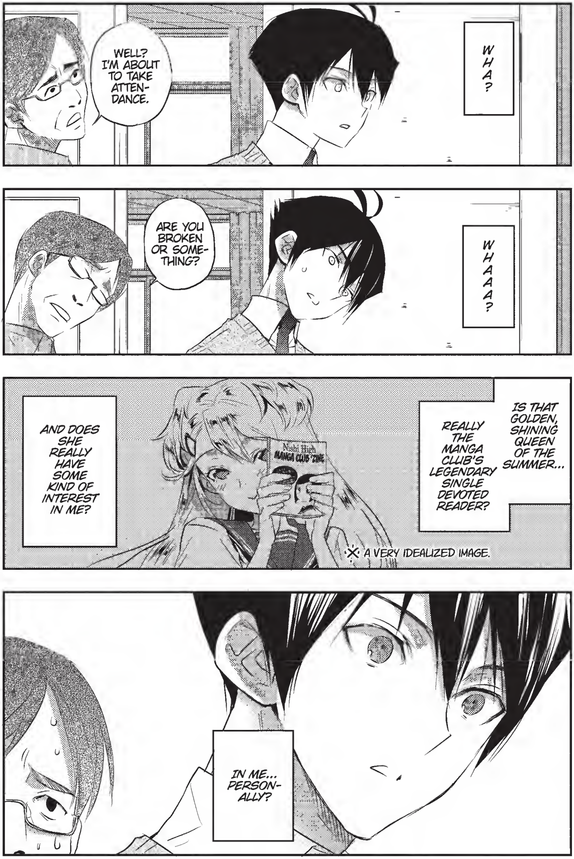

AH-HAAAH!
I DON'T GET POPULAR GUYS.
O-OKAY, CAPTAIN.
LET ME PICK UP WHERE I LEFT OFF IN YESTERDAY'S TEXT.
HERE.
DO YOU KNOW WHAT THIS IS?
A CELL PHONE STRAP?

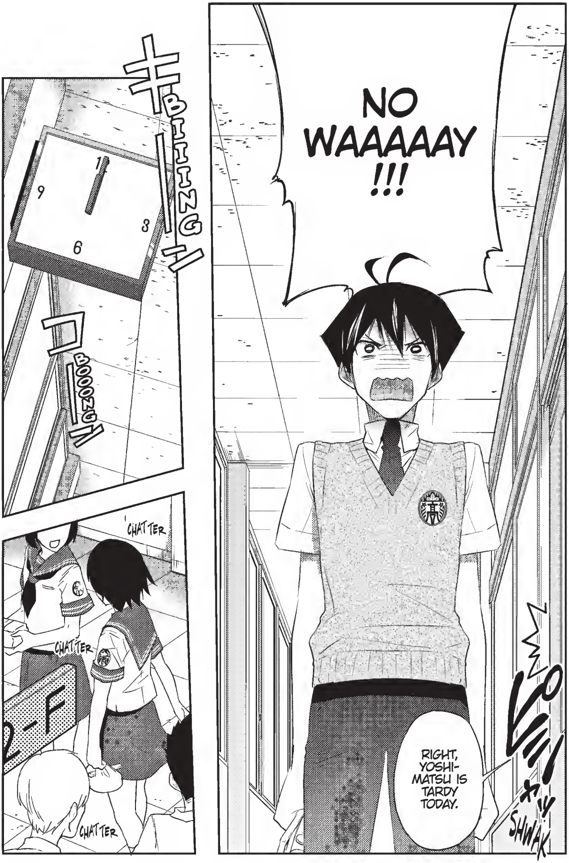

TCH!
BY SHEER HAPPENSTANCE, YESTERDAY AFTER SCHOOL...
I SAW *THE* ONE DEDICATED READER OF OUR CLUB ANTHOLOGY!
WHRL
HEY! WHAT'S WITH THAT REACTION?
THIS WAS ACCIDENTALLY DROPPED BY THAT PERSON.
I THINK *YOU* SHOULD BE THE ONE TO GIVE IT BACK.
DANGLE
HUNH.
SO THE LEGENDARY READER *DOES* EXIST.
WHO IS IT?
IF I'M SUPPOSED TO GIVE IT BACK, IS IT SOMEONE I KNOW?
I THINK ALL YOU'D NEED TO DO...
...WOULD BE TO GIVE IT BACK ALONG WITH THAT TOWEL.
YOU ALREADY KNOW WHAT CLASSROOM.

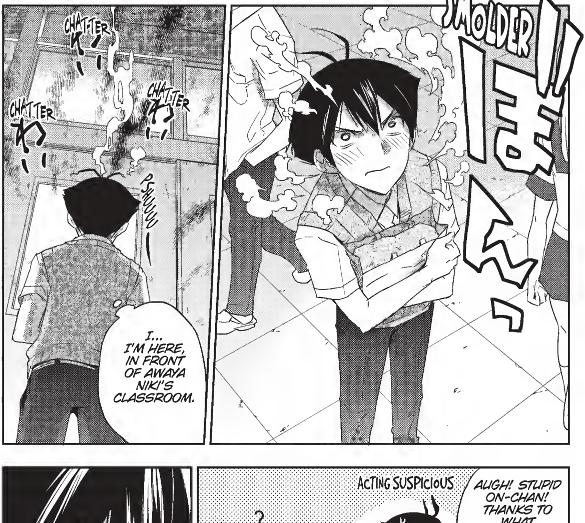

WHA?
DROPPED YOUR GUARD! *HIYAH!!*
HUH?! HEY!!
ON-CHAN, WAIT! COME BACK HERE! I STILL DON'T GET WHAT'S GOING ON...!
AWAWA
GOODNESS, YOU SURE ARE DENSE SOMETIMES.
ME? YOU'RE THE ONE WHO'S BEING VAGUE.
VAGUE? *SIGH.* NEED I SPELL IT OUT?
I EXPECT YOU WERE TOO PANICKED AT THE TIME TO REALLY NOTICE...
BUT THE OTHER DAY, WHEN YOU HAD THAT "INCIDENT" DURING YOUR SWIMMING EXAM...

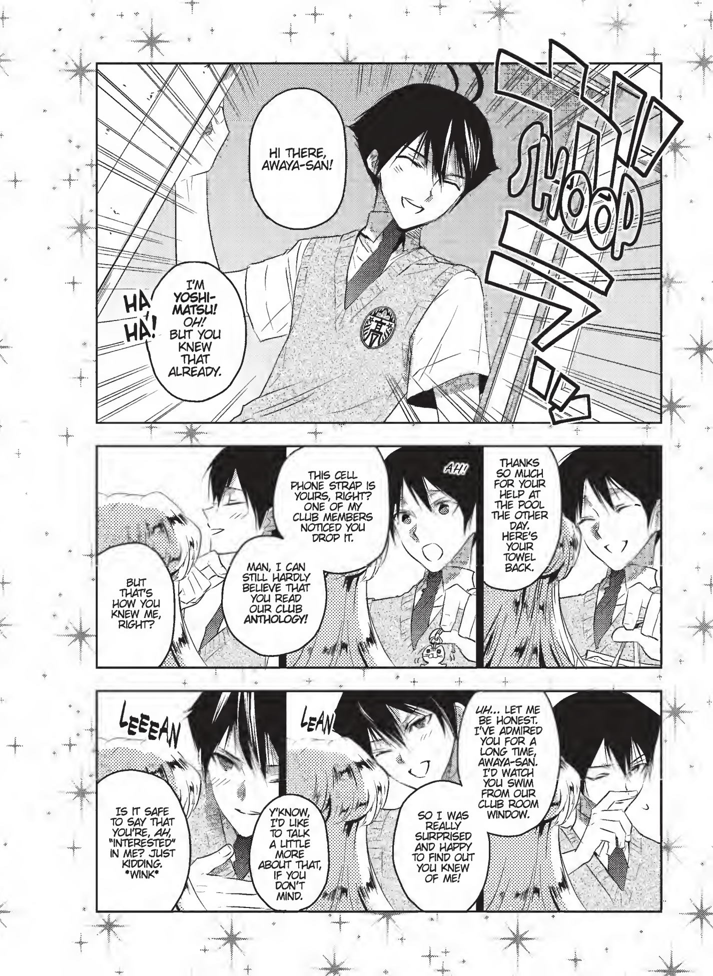

YOUR LONGING GLANCES AT A SPECIAL SOMEONE *MAY NOT* HAVE BEEN AS ONE-SIDED AS YOU THOUGHT.
THAT IS WHAT MY MAIDEN SENSE IS TELLING ME.
WHAT ...?
IN OTHER WORDS...
AND "THAT" GIRL FIRST SAW YOU...
SHE CALLED YOU BY YOUR **FIRST NAME.**

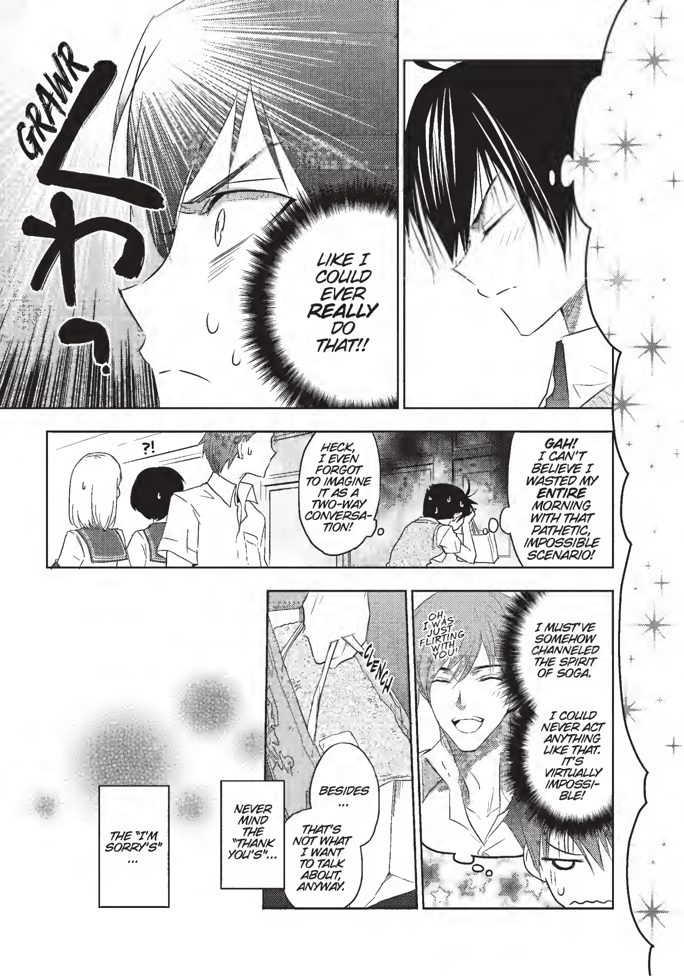

THEY MAY, IN FACT...
HAVE BEEN INTERACTIVE!!
AT LEAST, THAT IS WHAT *I* THINK.
AH! UH-OH, I'LL BE LATE.
GOTTA GO!
WAVE
すちゃっ
TELL ME ALL THE DETAILS LATER TODAY, OKAY?!
COMING IN, YOSHIMATSU?

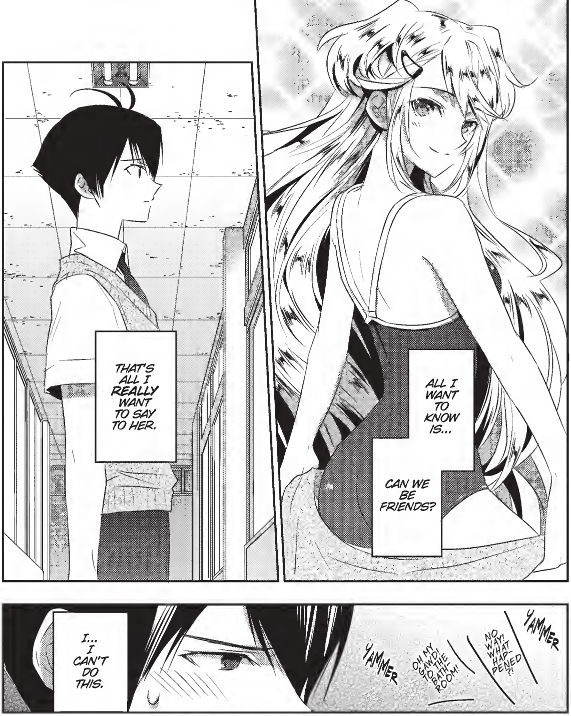

WHA?
WELL? I'M ABOUT TO TAKE ATTENDANCE.
WHAAAA?
ARE YOU BROKEN OR SOMETHING?
IS THAT GOLDEN, SHINING QUEEN OF THE SUMMER...
REALLY THE MANGA CLUB'S LEGENDARY SINGLE DEVOTED READER?
AND DOES SHE REALLY HAVE SOME KIND OF INTEREST IN ME?
Nishi High MANGA CLUB 'ZINE
※ A VERY IDEALIZED IMAGE.
IN ME... PERSONALLY?

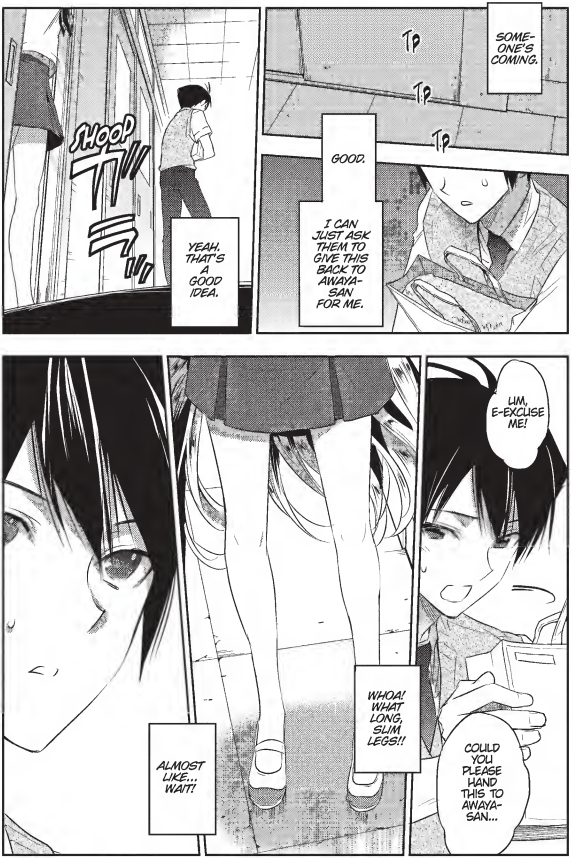

NO WAAAAAY!!!
RIGHT, YOSHIMATSU IS TARDY TODAY.
SHWAK
BIIIING
BOOONG
CHATTER
CHATTER
CHATTER
2-F

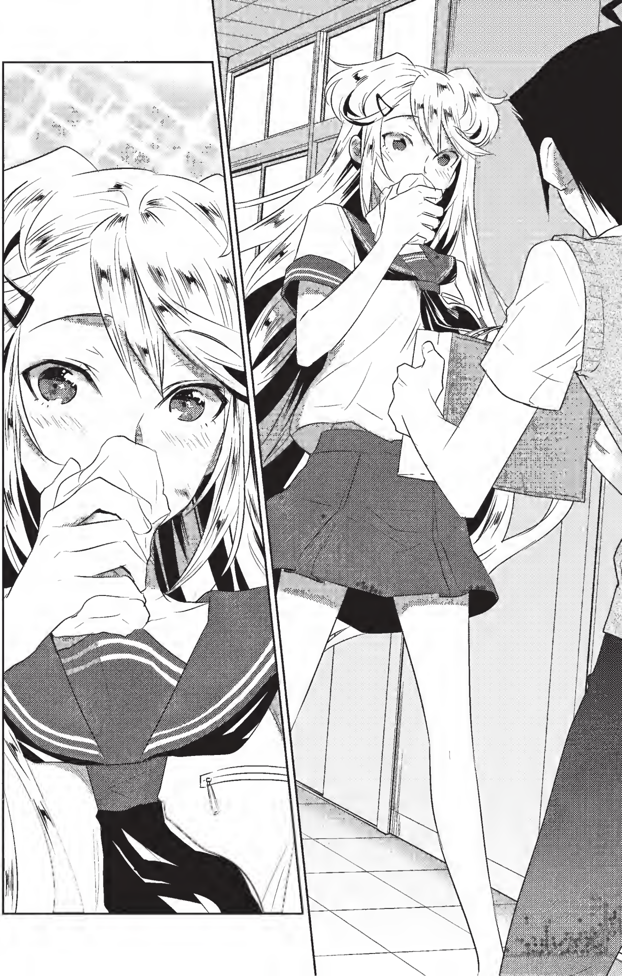

SMOLDER!!
ぼんっ
CHATTER
CHATTER
CHATTER
PSHUUU
I... I'M HERE, IN FRONT OF AWAYA NIKI'S CLASSROOM.
ACTING SUSPICIOUS
AUGH! STUPID ON-CHAN! THANKS TO WHAT SHE SAID, WHATEVER COURAGE I HAD COMPLETELY DISSIPATED!
FIDGET FIDGET
?
WHAT SHOULD I SAY WHEN I WALK IN?
SQUNCH
CALM DOWN! ALL I NEED TO DO IS FOLLOW THE MENTAL IMAGE I WORKED ON DURING CLASS EARLIER.

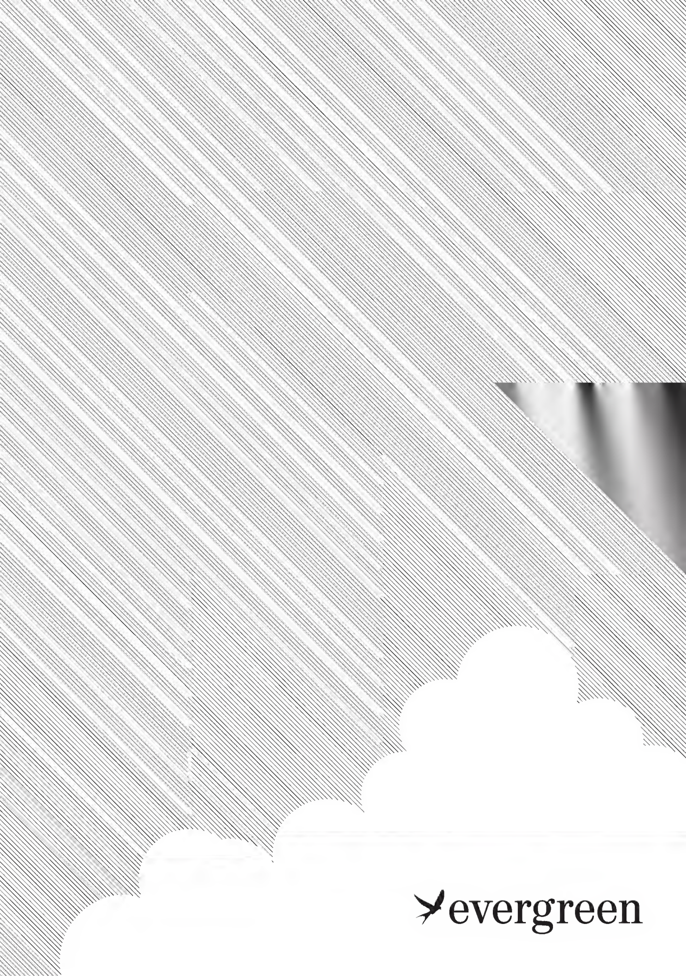

SHOOP
HI THERE, AWAYA-SAN!
I'M YOSHIMATSU! OH! BUT YOU KNEW THAT ALREADY.
HA HA!
THANKS SO MUCH FOR YOUR HELP AT THE POOL THE OTHER DAY. HERE'S YOUR TOWEL BACK.
AH!
THIS CELL PHONE STRAP IS YOURS, RIGHT? ONE OF MY CLUB MEMBERS NOTICED YOU DROP IT.
MAN, I CAN STILL HARDLY BELIEVE THAT YOU READ OUR CLUB ANTHOLOGY!
BUT THAT'S HOW YOU KNEW ME, RIGHT?
UH... LET ME BE HONEST. I'VE ADMIRED YOU FOR A LONG TIME, AWAYA-SAN. I'D WATCH YOU SWIM FROM OUR CLUB ROOM WINDOW.
LEAN
SO I WAS REALLY SURPRISED AND HAPPY TO FIND OUT YOU KNEW OF ME!
Y'KNOW, I'D LIKE TO TALK A LITTLE MORE ABOUT THAT, IF YOU DON'T MIND.
LEEEAN
IS IT SAFE TO SAY THAT YOU'RE, AH, "INTERESTED" IN ME? JUST KIDDING. *WINK*


GRAWR
LIKE I COULD EVER REALLY DO THAT!!
GAH! I CAN'T BELIEVE I WASTED MY ENTIRE MORNING WITH THAT PATHETIC, IMPOSSIBLE SCENARIO!
HECK, I EVEN FORGOT TO IMAGINE IT AS A TWO-WAY CONVERSATION!
?!
I MUST'VE SOMEHOW CHANNELED THE SPIRIT OF SOGA.
I COULD NEVER ACT ANYTHING LIKE THAT. IT'S VIRTUALLY IMPOSSIBLE!
OH, I WAS JUST FLIRTING WITH YOU!
CLENCH
BESIDES... THAT'S NOT WHAT I WANT TO TALK ABOUT, ANYWAY.
NEVER MIND THE "THANK YOU'S"...
THE "I'M SORRY'S"...


ALL I WANT TO KNOW IS...
CAN WE BE FRIENDS?
THAT'S ALL I REALLY WANT TO SAY TO HER.
YAMMER
NO WAY! WHAT HAPPENED?!
OH MY GAWD! TO THE BATHROOM!
YAMMER
I... I CAN'T DO THIS.
THERE IS NO WAY I COULD EVER STAND NEXT TO HER AND TALK TO HER ON ONE ONE.
YES, I CAN WALK AND TALK NOW...
BUT IN FRONT OF HER, I'M SURE I'LL FREEZE UP.


SOME-ONE'S COMING.
Tp
Tp
Tp
GOOD.
I CAN JUST ASK THEM TO GIVE THIS BACK TO AWAYA-SAN FOR ME.
SHOOP
YEAH. THAT'S A GOOD IDEA.
UM, E-EXCUSE ME!
COULD YOU PLEASE HAND THIS TO AWAYA-SAN...
WHOA! WHAT LONG, SLIM LEGS!!
ALMOST LIKE... WAIT!

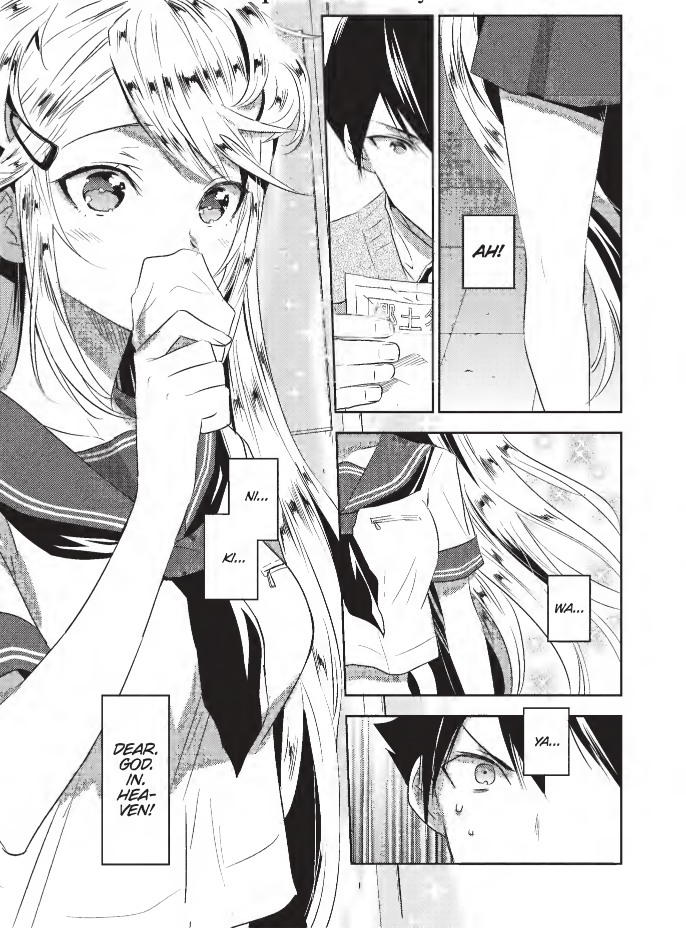


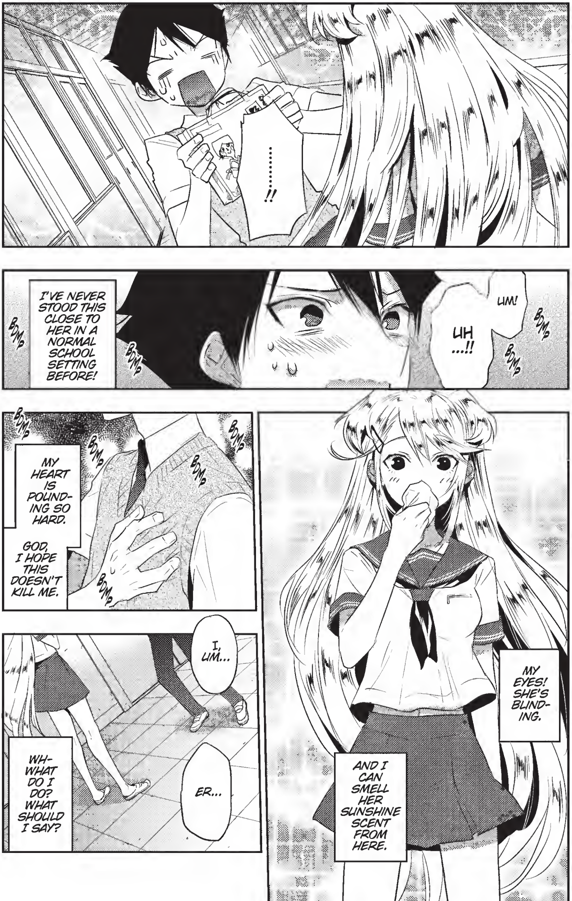


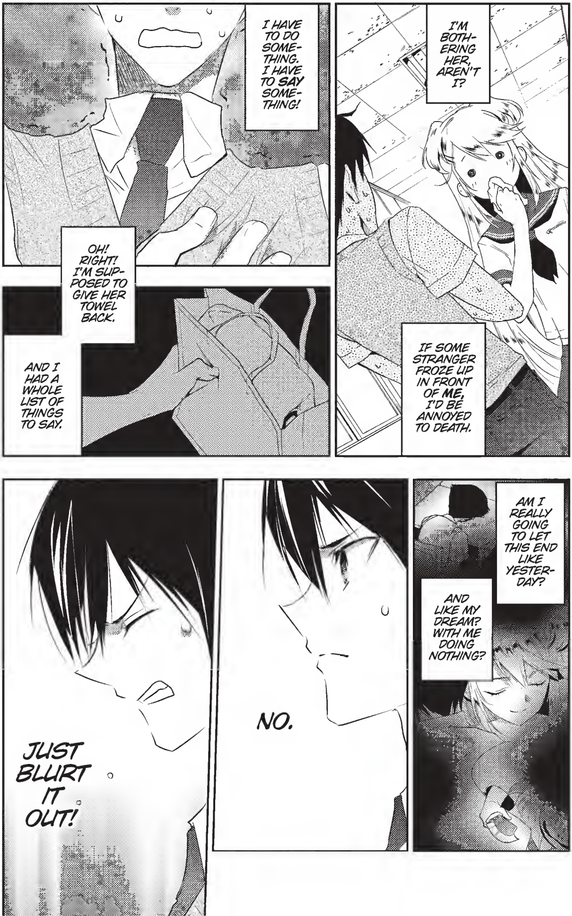
evergreen

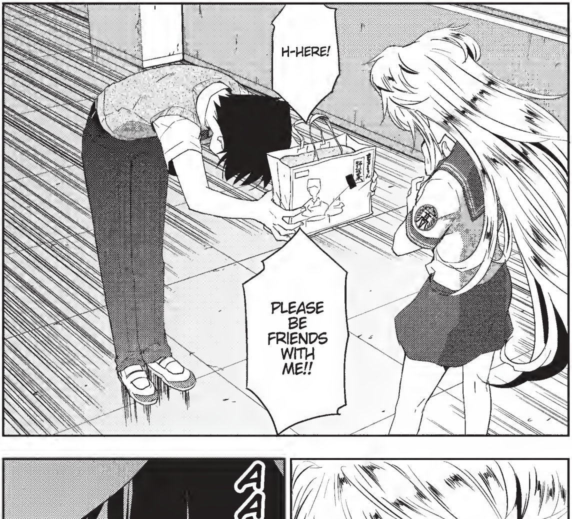
HMM... IS IT ACTUALLY POSSIBLE TO OVER-MOTIVATE A PERSON...?

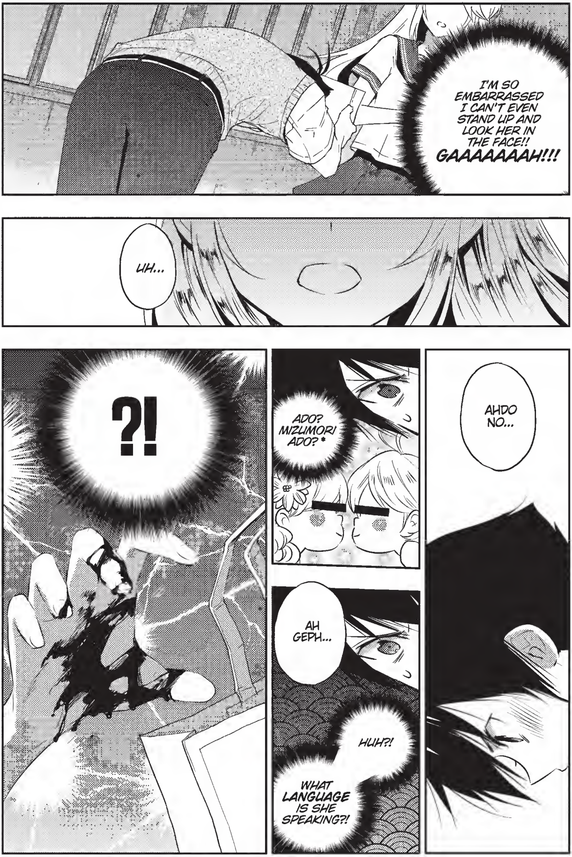
Chapter 4: Bloody Communication


AH!
WA...
YA...
NI...
KI...
DEAR. GOD. IN. HEA-VEN!

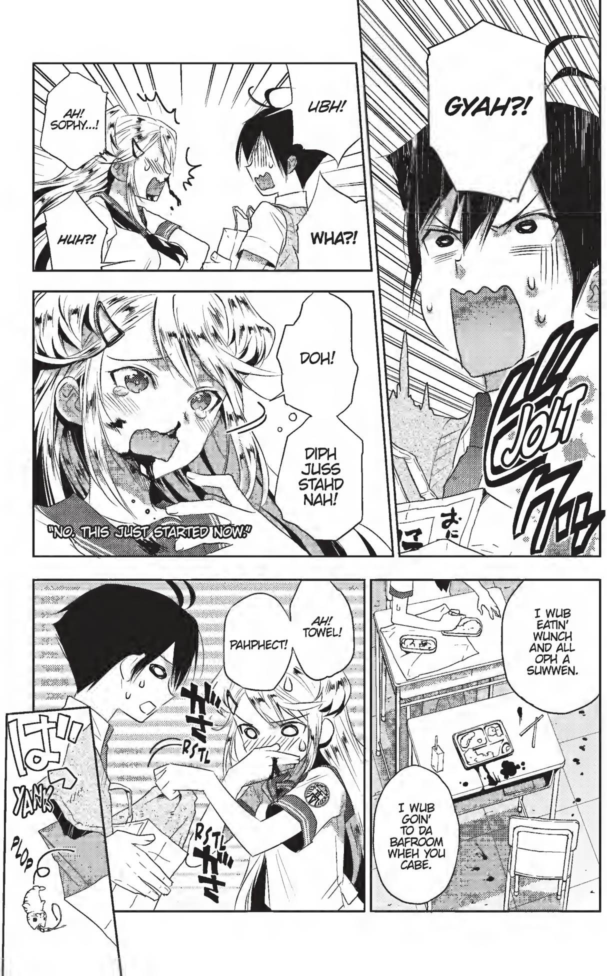

......!!
UM!
UH ...!!
BDMP
BDMP
I'VE NEVER STOOD THIS CLOSE TO HER IN A NORMAL SCHOOL SETTING BEFORE!
BDMP
BDMP
MY EYES! SHE'S BLINDING.
AND I CAN SMELL HER SUNSHINE SCENT FROM HERE.
BDMP
BDMP
BDMP
BDMP
MY HEART IS POUNDING SO HARD.
GOD, I HOPE THIS DOESN'T KILL ME.
BDMP
I, UM...
ER...
WH-WHAT DO I DO? WHAT SHOULD I SAY?

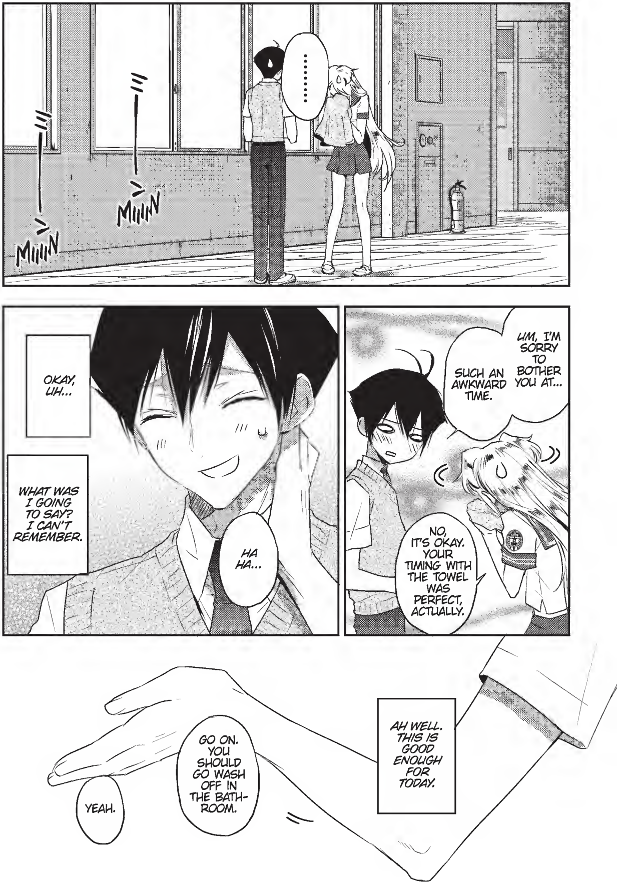

I'M BOTHERING HER, AREN'T I?
IF SOME STRANGER FROZE UP IN FRONT OF **ME,** I'D BE ANNOYED TO DEATH.
I HAVE TO DO SOMETHING. I HAVE TO **SAY** SOMETHING!
OH! RIGHT! I'M SUPPOSED TO GIVE HER TOWEL BACK.
AND I HAD A WHOLE LIST OF THINGS TO SAY.
AM I REALLY GOING TO LET THIS END LIKE YESTERDAY?
AND LIKE MY DREAM? WITH ME DOING NOTHING?
NO.
JUST BLURT IT OUT!

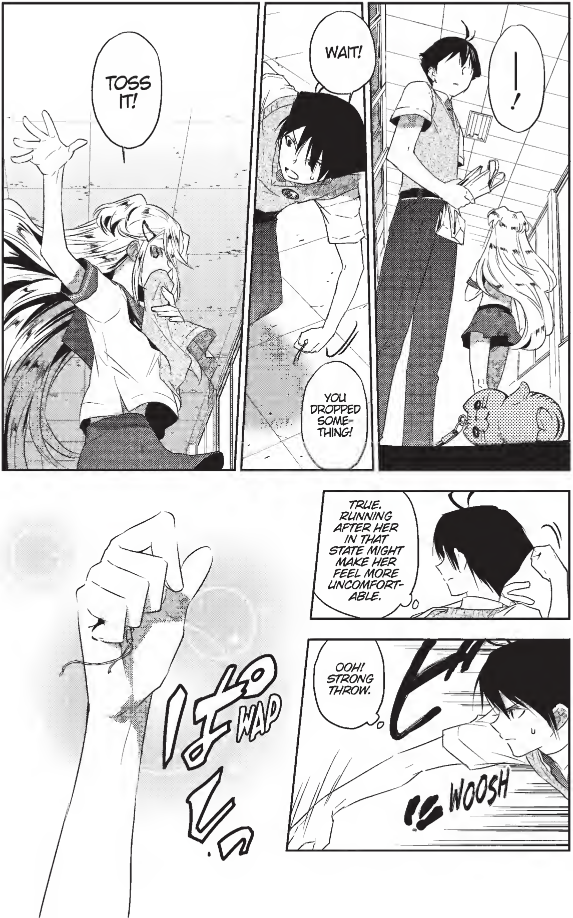

H-HERE!
PLEASE BE FRIENDS WITH ME!!
AAAAAUGH!!!
WHAT THE HECK DID I JUST SAY TO HER?!

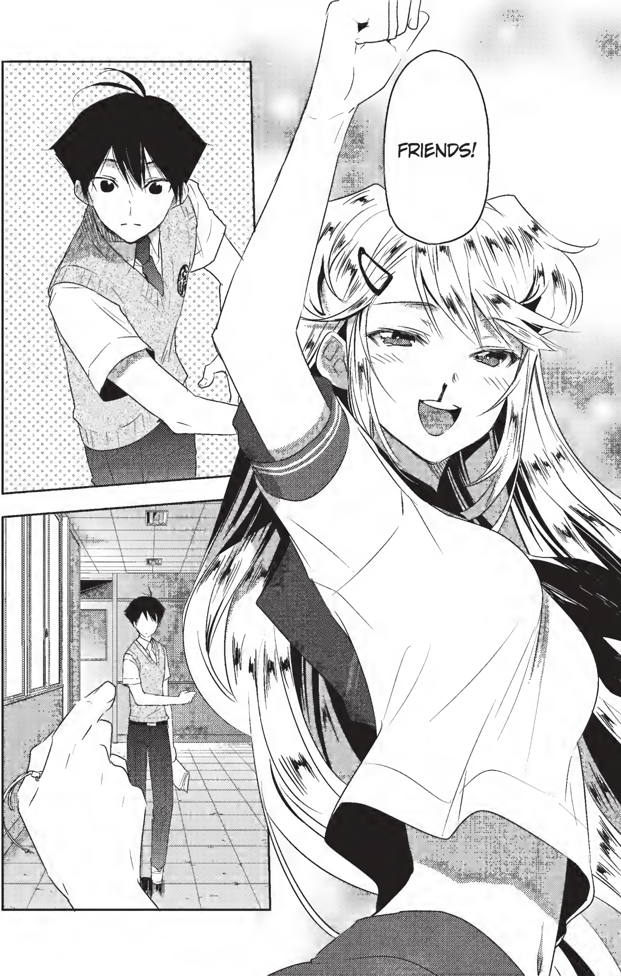

I'M SO EMBARRASSED I CAN'T EVEN STAND UP AND LOOK HER IN THE FACE!! GAAAAAAAH!!!
UH...
AHDO NO...
ADO? MIZUMORI ADO? *
AH GEPH...
HUH?!
WHAT LANGUAGE IS SHE SPEAKING?!
?!

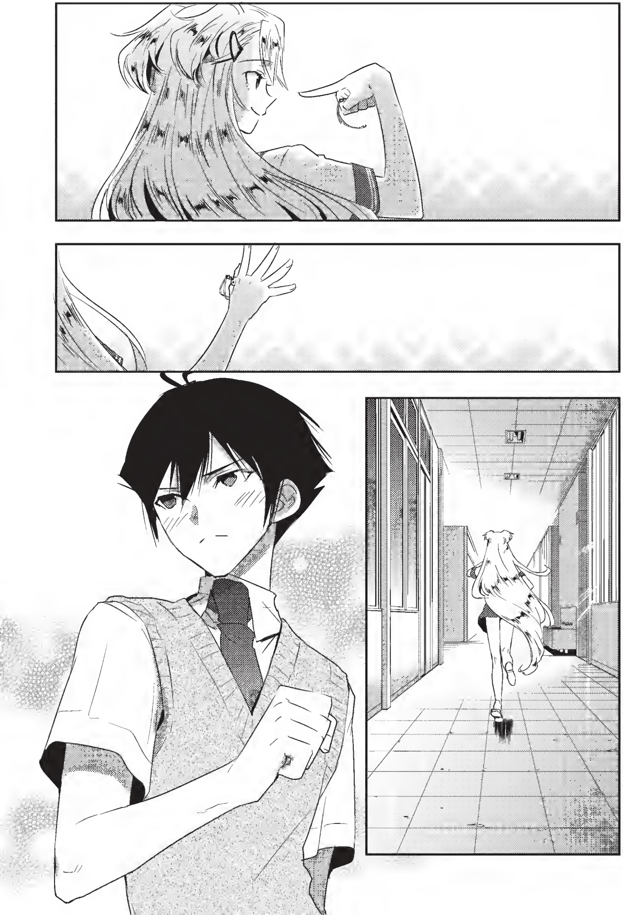
Ado Mizumori is an illustrator, actress and singer, best known for setting the standards for what the Japanese consider as Kawaii.

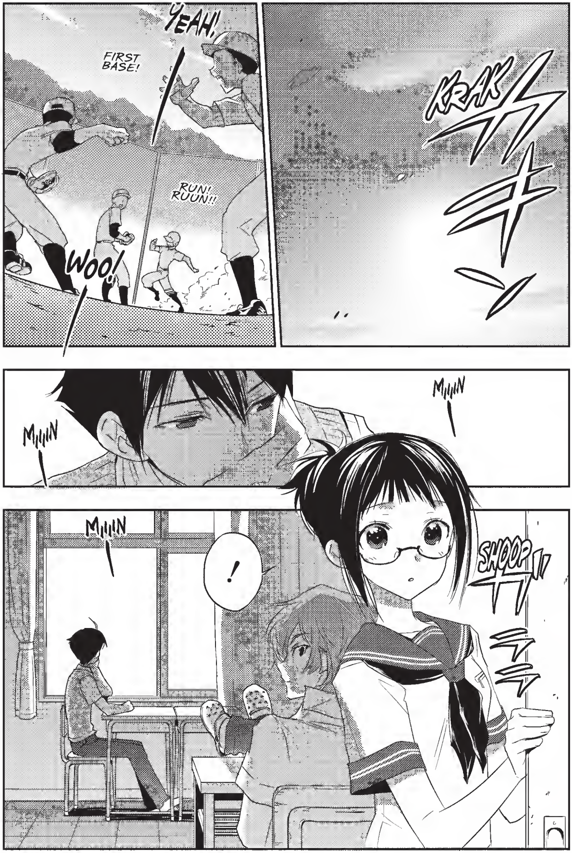

GYAH?!
JOLT
AH! SOPHY...!
UBH!
HUH?!
WHA?!
DOH!
DIPH JUSS STAHD NAH!
"NO. THIS JUST STARTED NOW."
I WUB EATIN' WUNCH AND ALL OPH A SUWWEN.
I WUB GOIN' TO DA BAFROOM WHEH YOU CABE.
AH! TOWEL!
PAHPHECT!
ガサ
RSTL
RSTL
ガサ
ばっ
YANK
PLOP

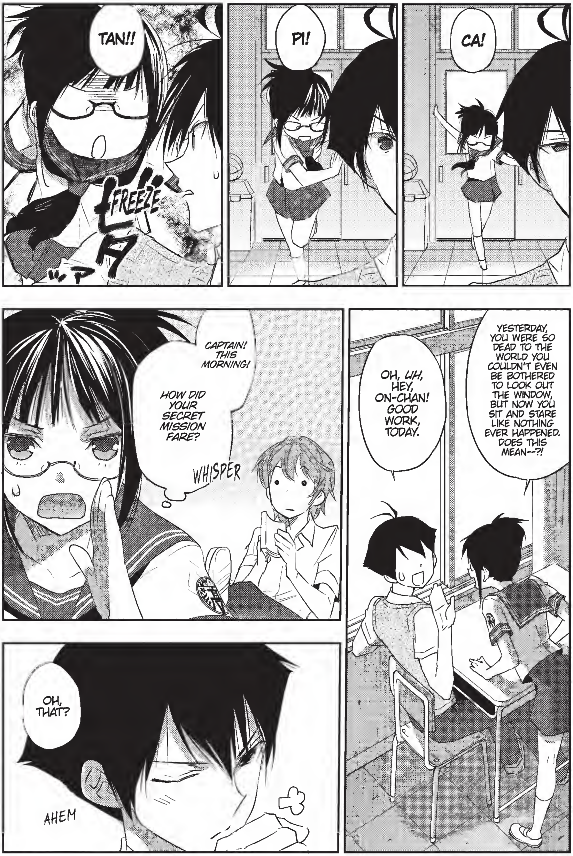

MIIIN
MIIIN
……
UM, I'M SORRY TO BOTHER YOU AT...
SUCH AN AWKWARD TIME.
NO, IT'S OKAY. YOUR TIMING WITH THE TOWEL WAS PERFECT, ACTUALLY.
OKAY, UH...
WHAT WAS I GOING TO SAY? I CAN'T REMEMBER.
HA HA...
AH WELL. THIS IS GOOD ENOUGH FOR TODAY.
GO ON. YOU SHOULD GO WASH OFF IN THE BATHROOM.
YEAH.

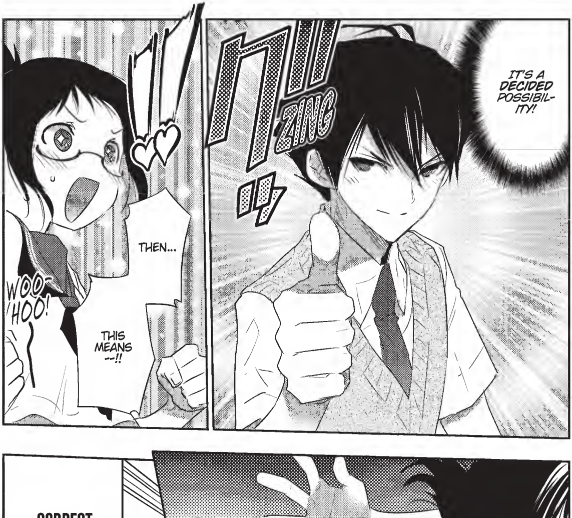

!
WAIT!
YOU DROPPED SOMETHING!
TOSS IT!
TRUE. RUNNING AFTER HER IN THAT STATE MIGHT MAKE HER FEEL MORE UNCOMFORTABLE.
OOH! STRONG THROW.
WOOSH
WAP


FRIENDS!




KRAK
カキーン
YEAH!
FIRST BASE!
RUN! RUUN!!
WOO!
MIIIN
MIIIN
MIIIN
!
SHOOP

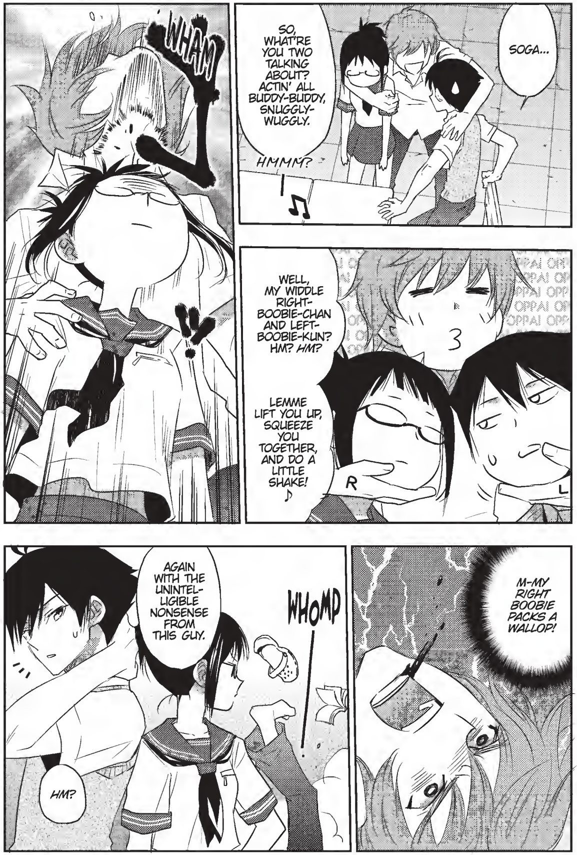

CA!
PI!
TAN!!
FREEZE
YESTERDAY, YOU WERE SO DEAD TO THE WORLD YOU COULDN'T EVEN BE BOTHERED TO LOOK OUT THE WINDOW, BUT NOW YOU SIT AND STARE LIKE NOTHING EVER HAPPENED. DOES THIS MEAN--?!
OH, UH, HEY, ON-CHAN! GOOD WORK, TODAY.
CAPTAIN! THIS MORNING!
HOW DID YOUR SECRET MISSION FARE?
WHISPER
OH, THAT?
AHEM

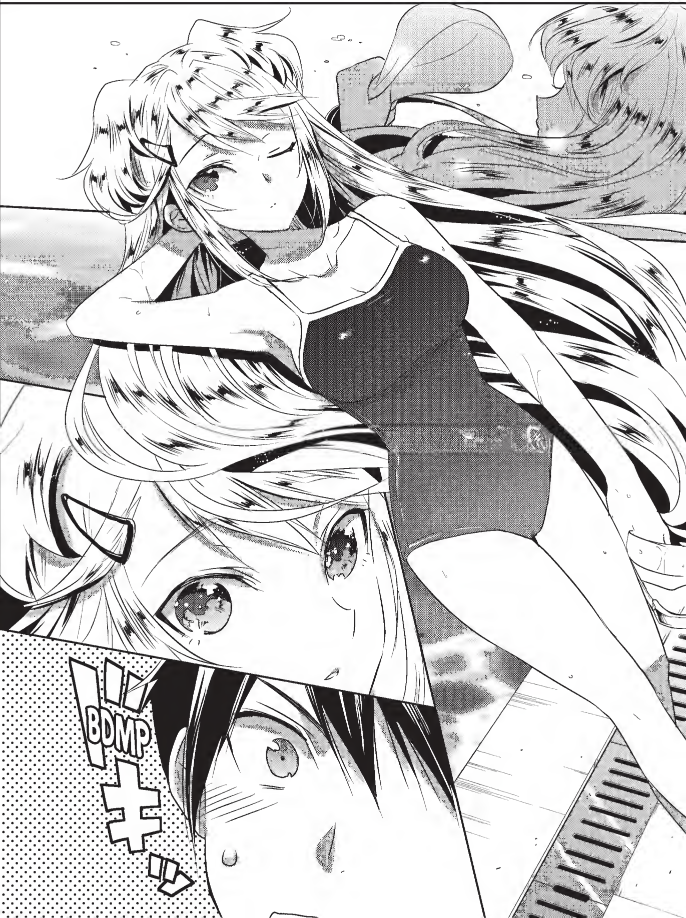

IT'S A DECIDED POSSIBILITY!
ZING
THEN...
THIS MEANS --!!
WOO-HOO!
GLOMP
"HOW GREAT IT IS TO HAVE GOOD BUDS."
AS SAID BY...
UHHH... BUSHI-WHAT'S-HIS-FACE.

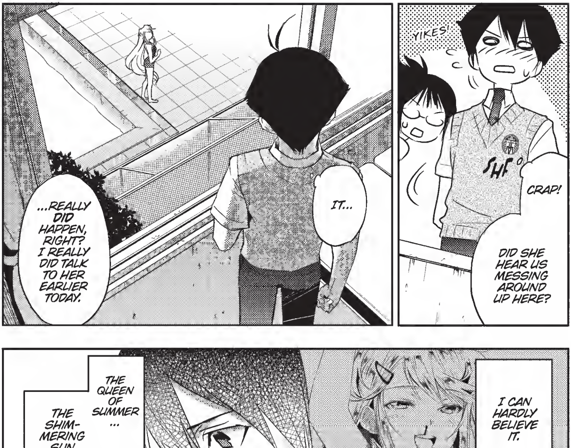
CORRECT ANSWER:

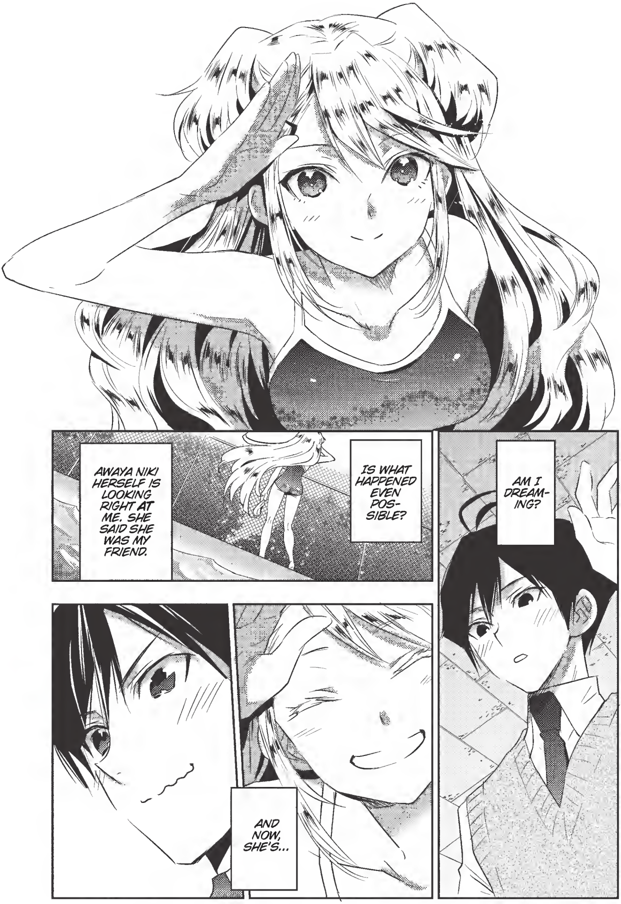
How beautiful it is to have good friends.

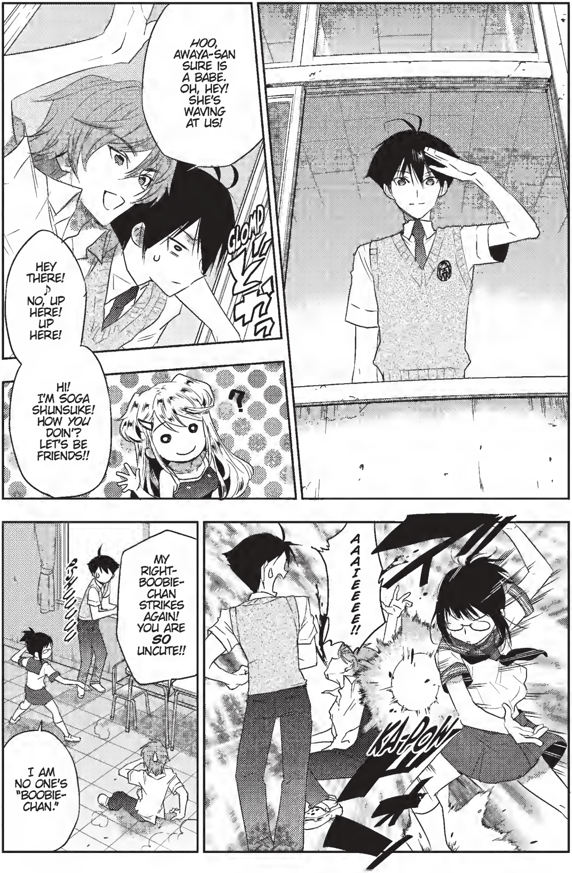
By Mushanokoji Saneatsu.

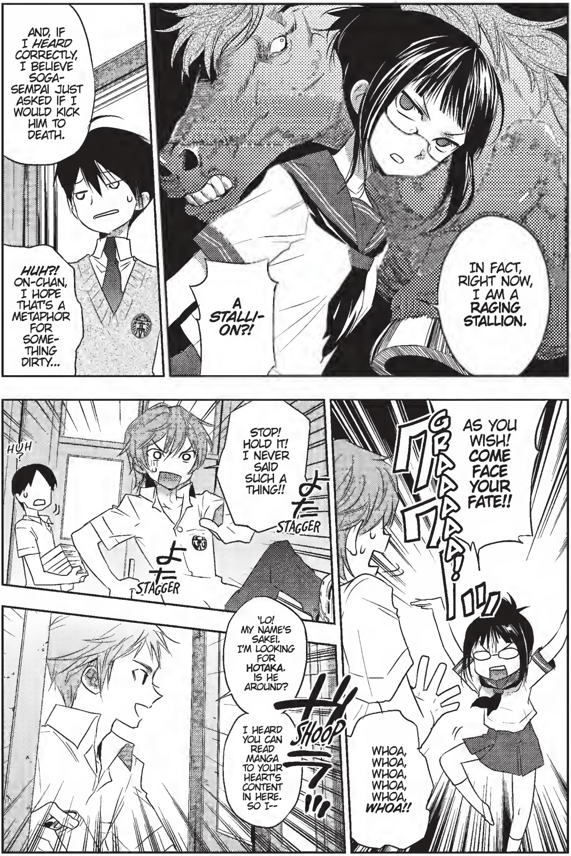

SOGA...
SO, WHAT'RE YOU TWO TALKING ABOUT? ACTIN' ALL BUDDY-BUDDY, SNUGGLY-WUGGLY.
HMMM?
♫
WELL, MY WIDDLE RIGHT-BOOBIE-CHAN AND LEFT-BOOBIE-KUN? HM? HM?
LEMME LIFT YOU UP, SQUEEZE YOU TOGETHER, AND DO A LITTLE SHAKE! ♪
OPPAI OPPAI OPPAI OPPAI
R
L
WHAM
M-MY RIGHT BOOBIE PACKS A WALLOP!
AGAIN WITH THE UNINTELLIGIBLE NONSENSE FROM THIS GUY.
WHOMP
HM?

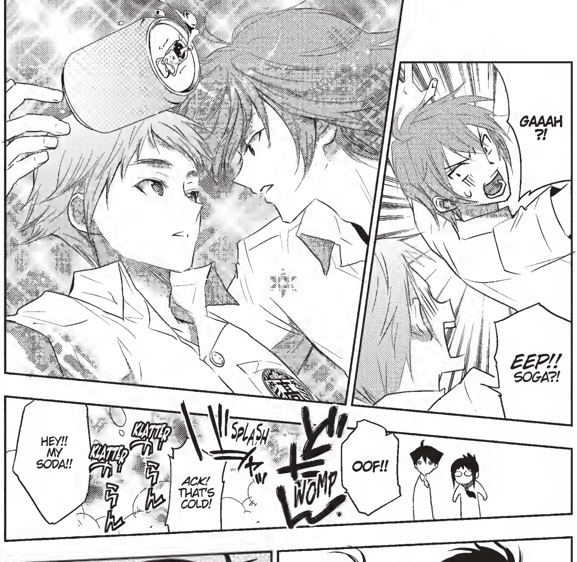

!! BDMP
キッ

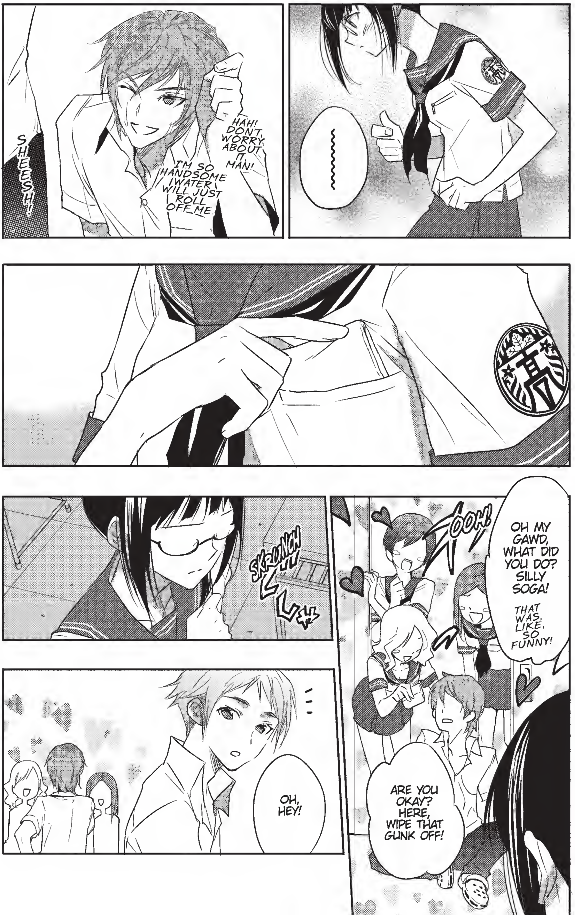

YIKES!
SHF
CRAP!
DID SHE HEAR US MESSING AROUND UP HERE?
IT...
...REALLY DID HAPPEN, RIGHT? I REALLY DID TALK TO HER EARLIER TODAY.
I CAN HARDLY BELIEVE IT.
THE QUEEN OF SUMMER...
THE SHIMMERING SUN THAT IS AWAYA NIKI...
IS NOW FRIENDS WITH ME.
RIGHT?

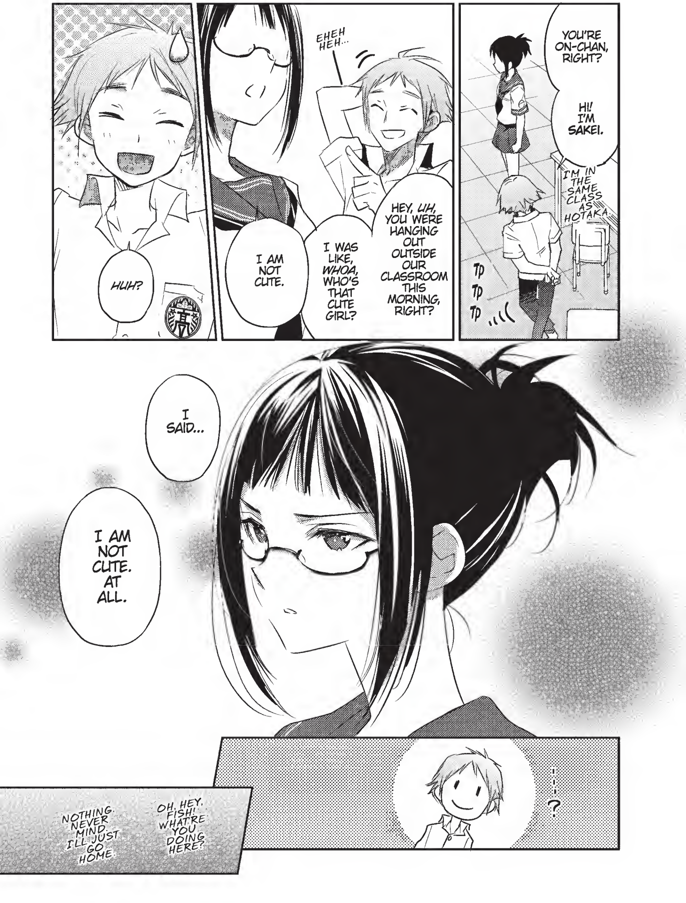

AM I DREAMING?
IS WHAT HAPPENED EVEN POSSIBLE?
AWAYA NIKI HERSELF IS LOOKING RIGHT AT ME. SHE SAID SHE WAS MY FRIEND.
AND NOW, SHE'S...

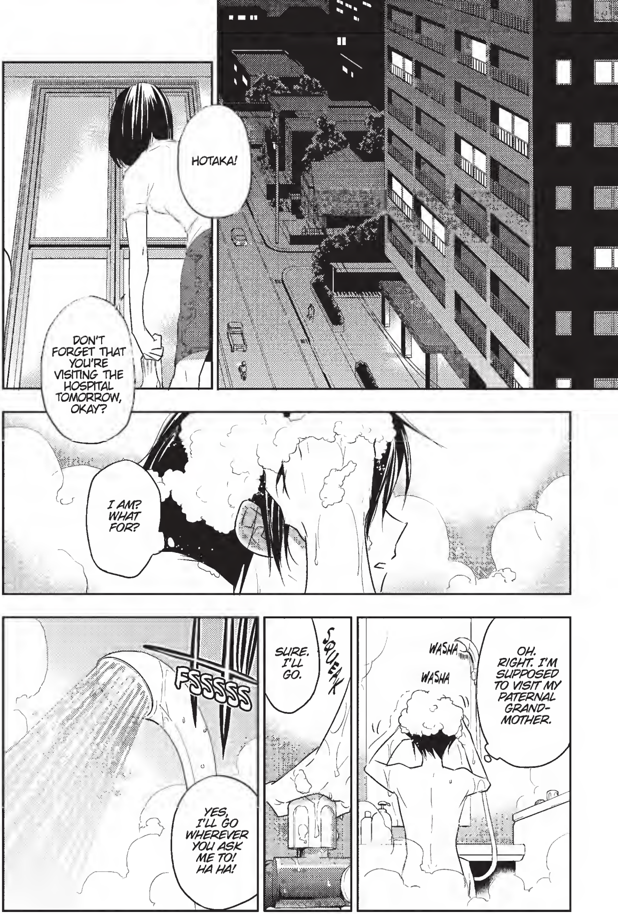

HOO, AWAYA-SAN SURE IS A BABE. OH, HEY! SHE'S WAVING AT US!
GLOMP
HEY THERE! ♪ NO, UP HERE! UP HERE!
HI! I'M SOGA SHUNSUKE! HOW *YOU* DOIN'? LET'S BE FRIENDS!!
?
AAAIEEEE!!
KA-POW
MY RIGHT-BOOBIE-CHAN STRIKES AGAIN! YOU ARE *SO* UNCUTE!!
PSHUUUUU
I AM NO ONE'S "BOOBIE-CHAN."

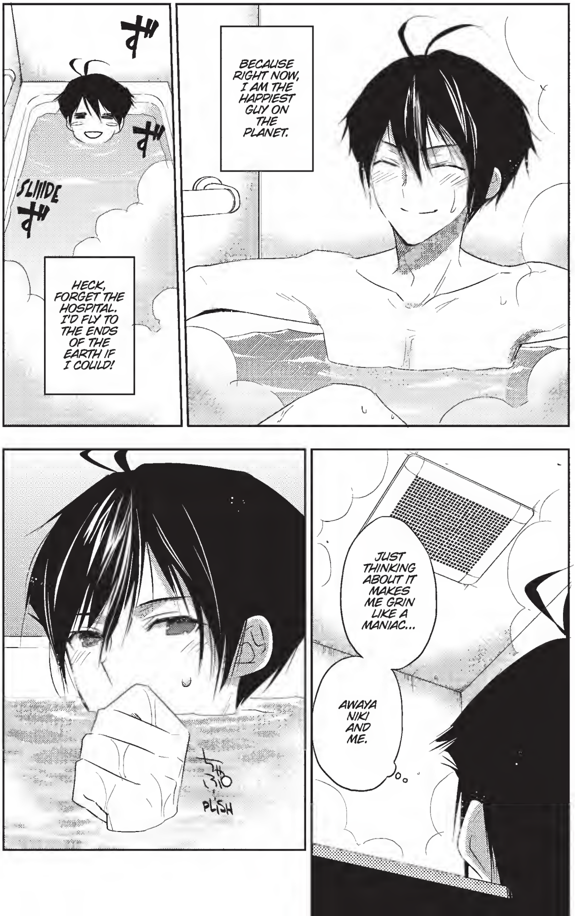

AND, IF I *HEARD* CORRECTLY, I BELIEVE SOGA-SEMPAI JUST ASKED IF I WOULD KICK HIM TO DEATH.
IN FACT, RIGHT NOW, I AM A **RAGING STALLION.**
A STALLI-ON?!
HUH?! ON-CHAN, I HOPE THAT'S A METAPHOR FOR SOMETHING DIRTY...
STOP! HOLD IT! I NEVER SAID SUCH A THING!!
よた
STAGGER
HUH?
よた
STAGGER
GRAAAAA!!
AS YOU WISH! **COME FACE YOUR FATE!!**
WHOA, WHOA, WHOA, WHOA, WHOA, ***WHOA!!***
SHOOP
'LO! MY NAME'S SAKEI. I'M LOOKING FOR HOTAKA. IS HE AROUND?
I HEARD YOU CAN READ MANGA TO YOUR HEART'S CONTENT IN HERE. SO I--

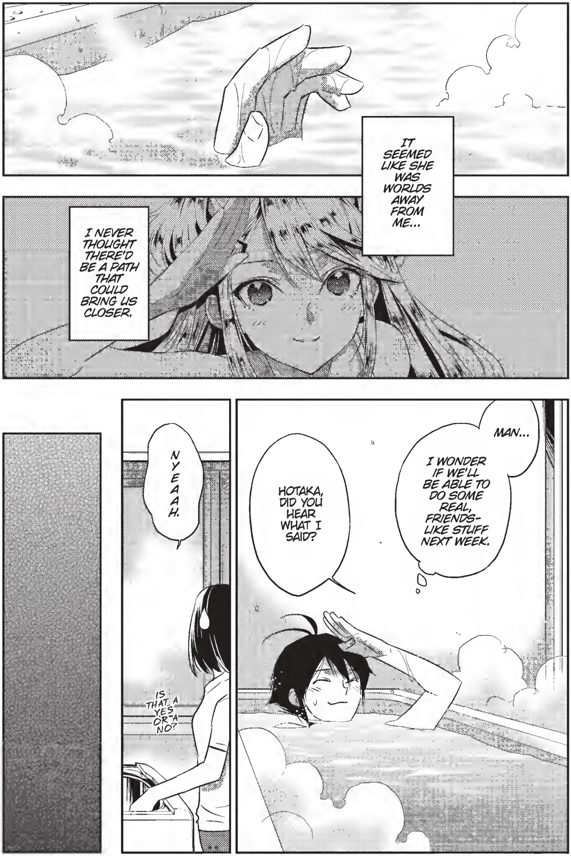

GAAAH ?!
EEP!! SOGA?!
OOF!!
WOMP
SPLASH
ACK! THAT'S COLD!
KLATTER
KLATTER
HEY!! MY SODA!!
HMPH. WHAT A FILTHY DISPLAY.
AW, MAAAAN!
BLEAH! TOO SWEET!
C'MON, ON-CHAN. HOW ABOUT YOU EASE UP ON HIM NOW?
EW! WHAT A MESS.
......
OKAY. WHAT TO DO FOR OUR NEXT ANTHOLOGY?

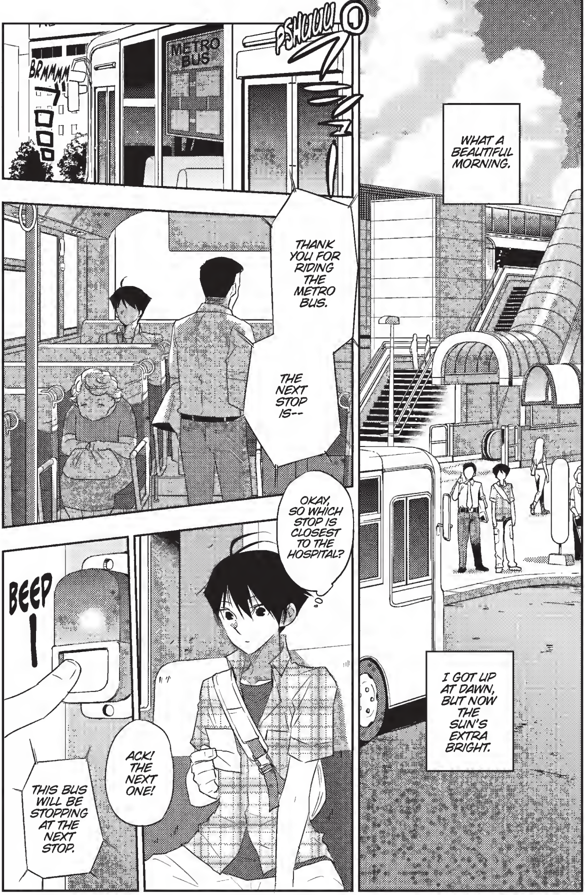

HAH! DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT, MAN!
I'M SO HANDSOME WATER WILL JUST ROLL OFF ME.
SHEESH!
OOH!
OH MY GAWD, WHAT DID YOU DO? SILLY SOGA!
THAT WAS, LIKE, SO FUNNY!
ARE YOU OKAY? HERE, WIPE THAT GUNK OFF!
SKRUNCH
OH, HEY!

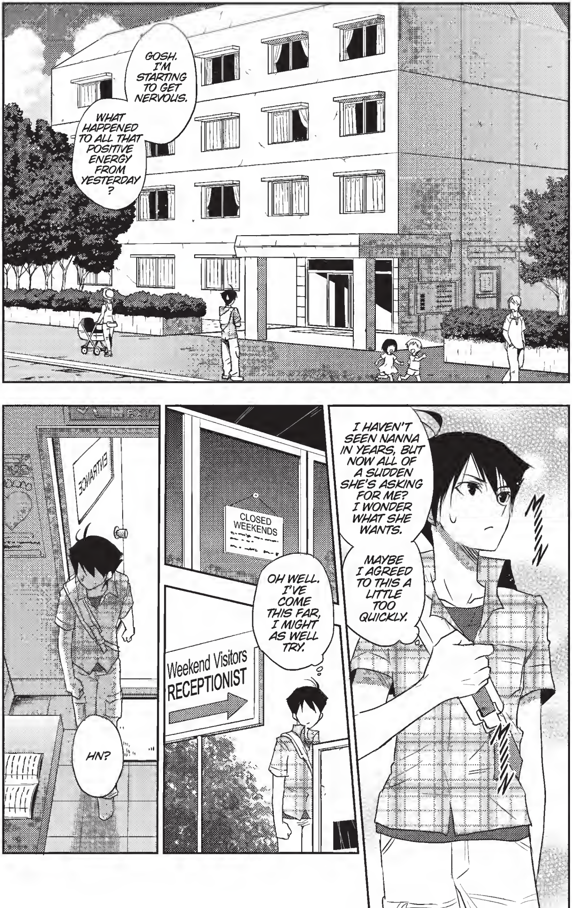

YOU'RE ON-CHAN, RIGHT?
HI! I'M SAKEI.
I'M IN THE SAME CLASS AS HOTAKA
Tp Tp Tp
EHEH HEH...
HEY, UH, YOU WERE HANGING OUT OUTSIDE OUR CLASSROOM THIS MORNING, RIGHT?
I WAS LIKE, WHOA, WHO'S THAT CUTE GIRL?
I AM NOT CUTE.
HUH?
I SAID...
I AM NOT CUTE. AT ALL.
...?
OH, HEY, FISH! WHAT'RE YOU DOING HERE?
NOTHING. NEVER MIND. I'LL JUST GO HOME.

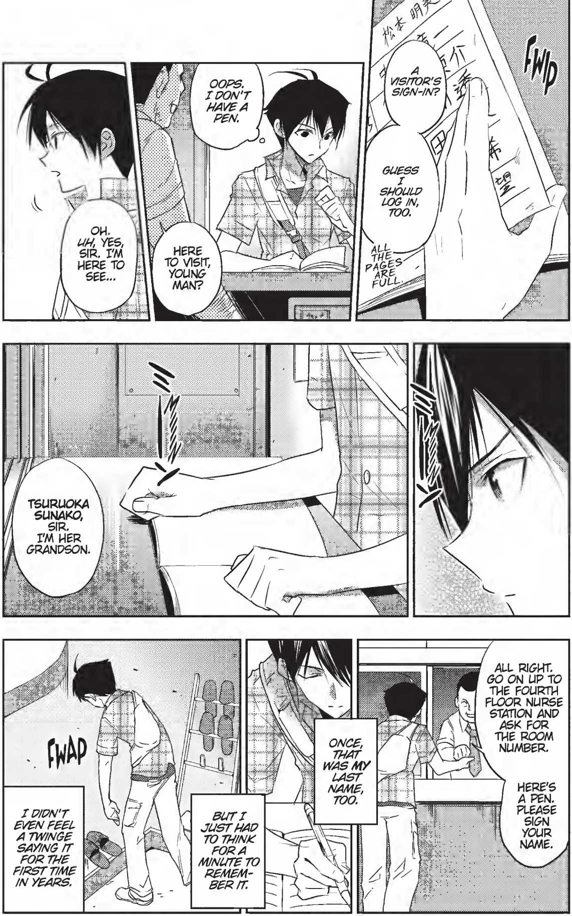

HOTAKA!
DON'T FORGET THAT YOU'RE VISITING THE HOSPITAL TOMORROW, OKAY?
I AM? WHAT FOR?
WASHA
WASHA
OH. RIGHT. I'M SUPPOSED TO VISIT MY PATERNAL GRANDMOTHER.
SQUEAK
SURE. I'LL GO.
FSSSSS
YES, I'LL GO WHEREVER YOU ASK ME TO! HA HA!

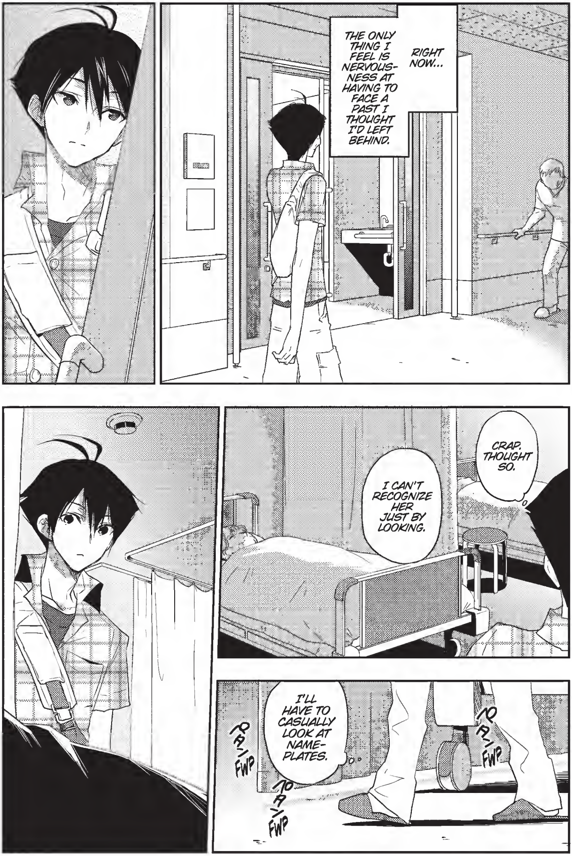

BECAUSE RIGHT NOW, I AM THE HAPPIEST GUY ON THE PLANET.
ず
ず
SLIIIDE
ず
HECK, FORGET THE HOSPITAL. I'D FLY TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH IF I COULD!
JUST THINKING ABOUT IT MAKES ME GRIN LIKE A MANIAC...
AWAYA NIKI AND ME.
ちゃぷ
PLISH

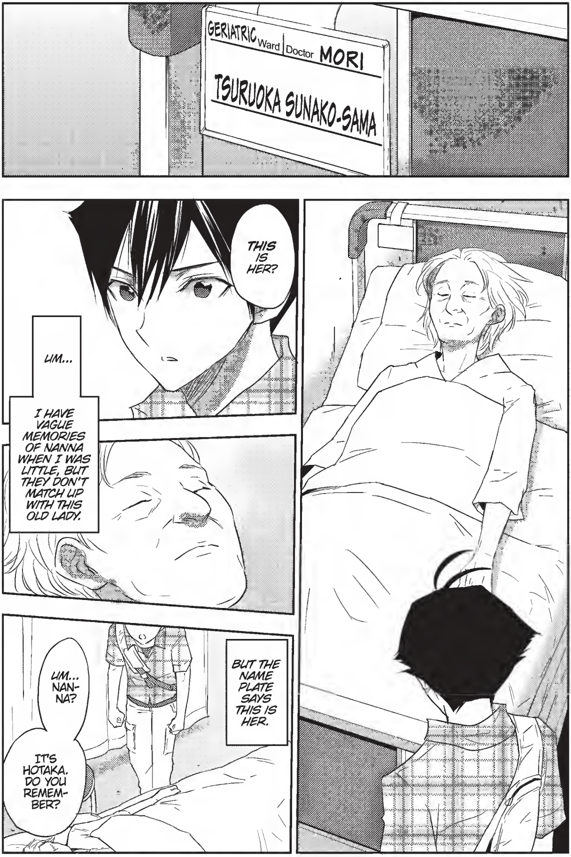

IT SEEMED LIKE SHE WAS WORLDS AWAY FROM ME...
I NEVER THOUGHT THERE'D BE A PATH THAT COULD BRING US CLOSER.
MAN...
I WONDER IF WE'LL BE ABLE TO DO SOME REAL, FRIENDS-LIKE STUFF NEXT WEEK.
HOTAKA, DID YOU HEAR WHAT I SAID?
NYEAAH.
IS THAT A YES OR A NO?

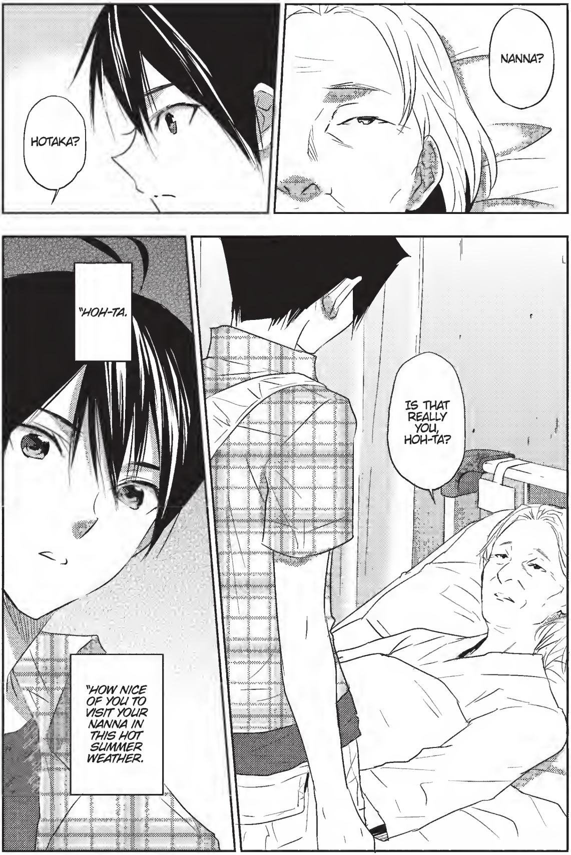

WHAT A BEAUTIFUL MORNING.
I GOT UP AT DAWN, BUT NOW THE SUN'S EXTRA BRIGHT.
PSHUUU
METRO BUS
BRMMMM
THANK YOU FOR RIDING THE METRO BUS.
THE NEXT STOP IS--
OKAY, SO WHICH STOP IS CLOSEST TO THE HOSPITAL?
ACK! THE NEXT ONE!
BEEP
THIS BUS WILL BE STOPPING AT THE NEXT STOP.

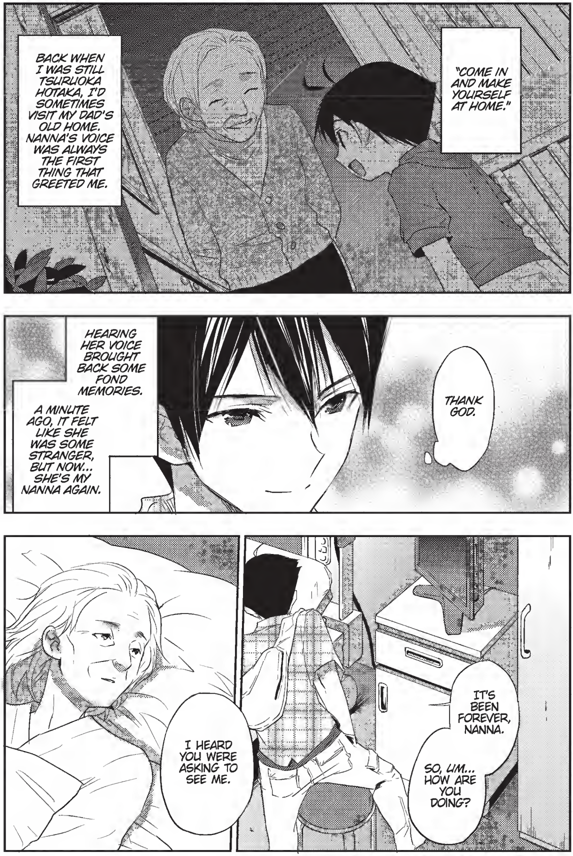

GOSH. I'M STARTING TO GET NERVOUS.
WHAT HAPPENED TO ALL THAT POSITIVE ENERGY FROM YESTERDAY?
I HAVEN'T SEEN NANNA IN YEARS, BUT NOW ALL OF A SUDDEN SHE'S ASKING FOR ME? I WONDER WHAT SHE WANTS.
MIIIN
MAYBE I AGREED TO THIS A LITTLE TOO QUICKLY.
MIIIN
CLOSED WEEKENDS
OH WELL. I'VE COME THIS FAR, I MIGHT AS WELL TRY.
Weekend Visitors RECEPTIONIST
ENTRANCE
HN?

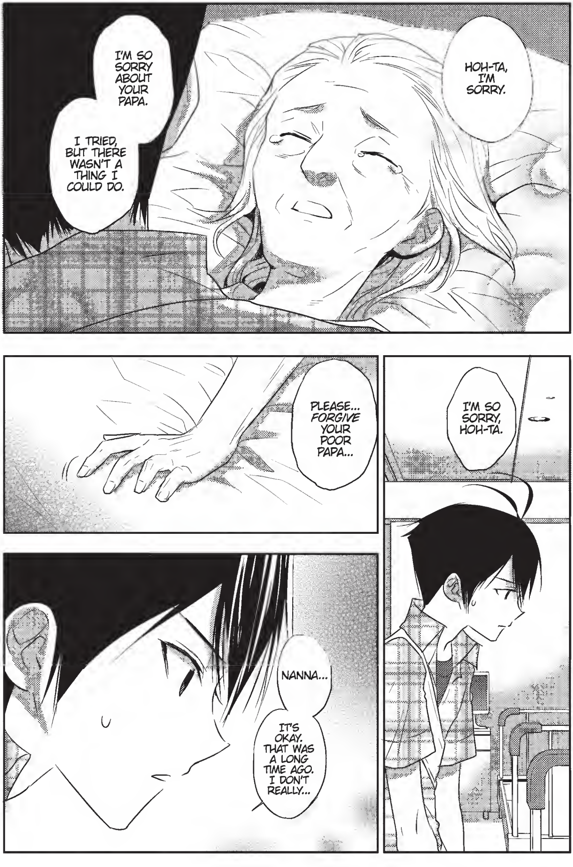

FWIP
A VISITOR'S SIGN-IN?
GUESS I SHOULD LOG IN, TOO.
ALL THE PAGES ARE FULL.
OOPS. I DON'T HAVE A PEN.
HERE TO VISIT, YOUNG MAN?
OH. UH, YES, SIR. I'M HERE TO SEE...
TSURUOKA SUNAKO, SIR. I'M HER GRANDSON.
ALL RIGHT. GO ON UP TO THE FOURTH FLOOR NURSE STATION AND ASK FOR THE ROOM NUMBER.
HERE'S A PEN. PLEASE SIGN YOUR NAME.
ONCE, THAT WAS MY LAST NAME, TOO.
BUT I JUST HAD TO THINK FOR A MINUTE TO REMEMBER IT.
FWAP
I DIDN'T EVEN FEEL A TWINGE SAYING IT FOR THE FIRST TIME IN YEARS.

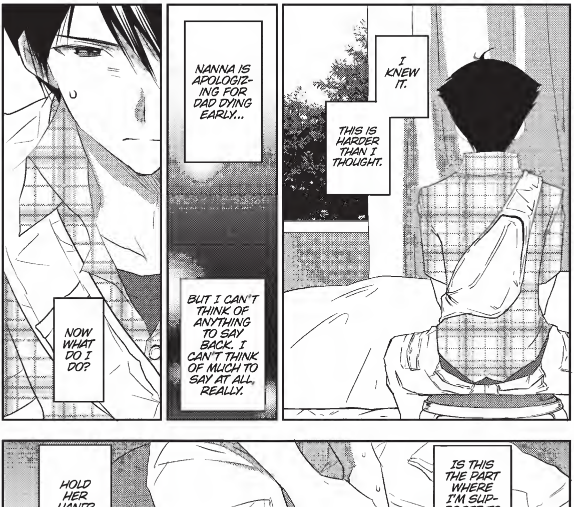

RIGHT NOW...
THE ONLY THING I FEEL IS NERVOUSNESS AT HAVING TO FACE A PAST I THOUGHT I'D LEFT BEHIND.
CRAP. THOUGHT SO.
I CAN'T RECOGNIZE HER JUST BY LOOKING.
FWP
FWP
I'LL HAVE TO CASUALLY LOOK AT NAMEPLATES.
FWP

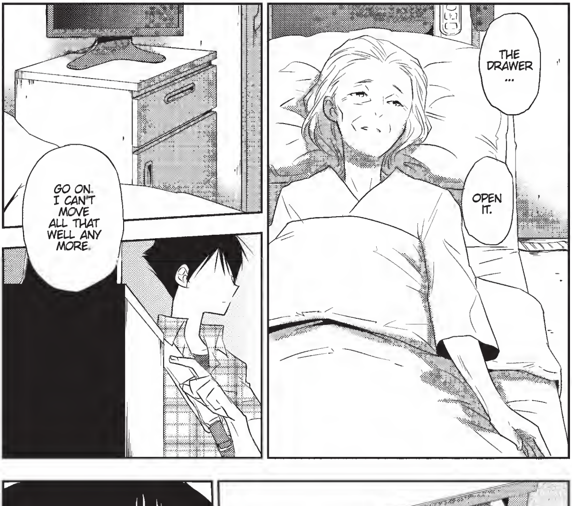

GERIATRIC Ward Doctor MORI
TSURUOKA SUNAKO-SAMA
THIS IS HER?
UM...
I HAVE VAGUE MEMORIES OF NANNA WHEN I WAS LITTLE, BUT THEY DON'T MATCH UP WITH THIS OLD LADY.
BUT THE NAME PLATE SAYS THIS IS HER.
UM... NAN-NA?
IT'S HOTAKA. DO YOU REMEMBER?

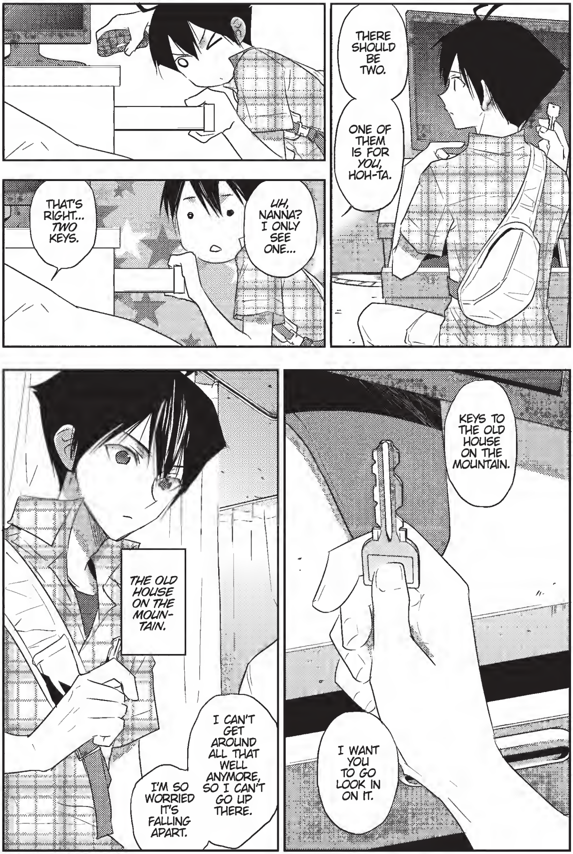

NANNA?
HOTAKA?
IS THAT REALLY YOU, HOH-TA?
"HOH-TA.
"HOW NICE OF YOU TO VISIT YOUR NANNA IN THIS HOT SUMMER WEATHER.

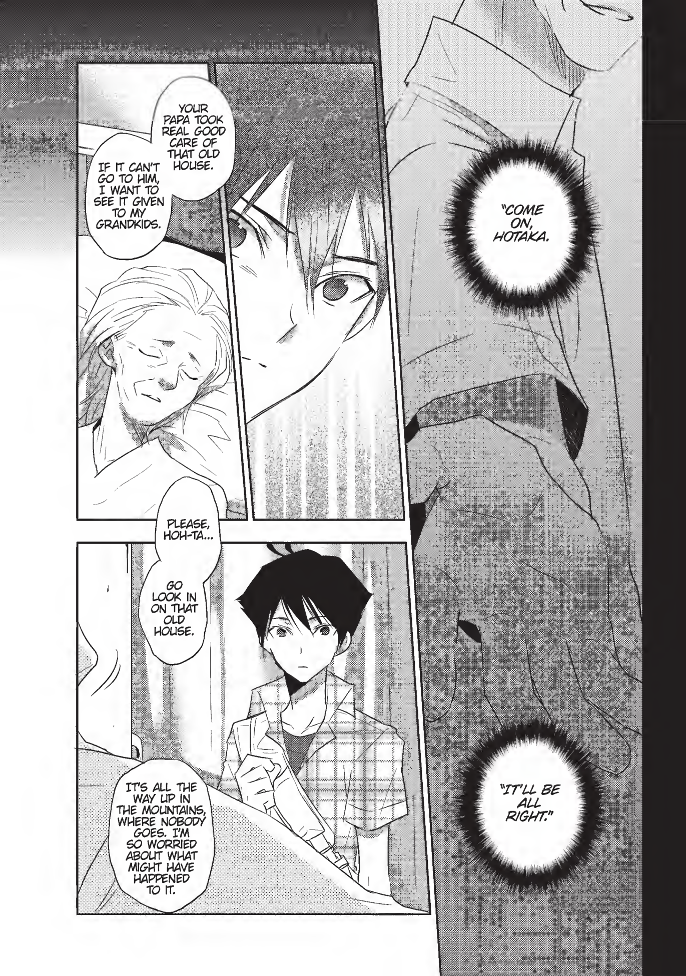

"COME IN AND MAKE YOURSELF AT HOME."
BACK WHEN I WAS STILL TSURUOKA HOTAKA, I'D SOMETIMES VISIT MY DAD'S OLD HOME. NANNA'S VOICE WAS ALWAYS THE FIRST THING THAT GREETED ME.
THANK GOD.
HEARING HER VOICE BROUGHT BACK SOME FOND MEMORIES.
A MINUTE AGO, IT FELT LIKE SHE WAS SOME STRANGER, BUT NOW... SHE'S MY NANNA AGAIN.
IT'S BEEN FOREVER, NANNA.
SO, UM... HOW ARE YOU DOING?
I HEARD YOU WERE ASKING TO SEE ME.

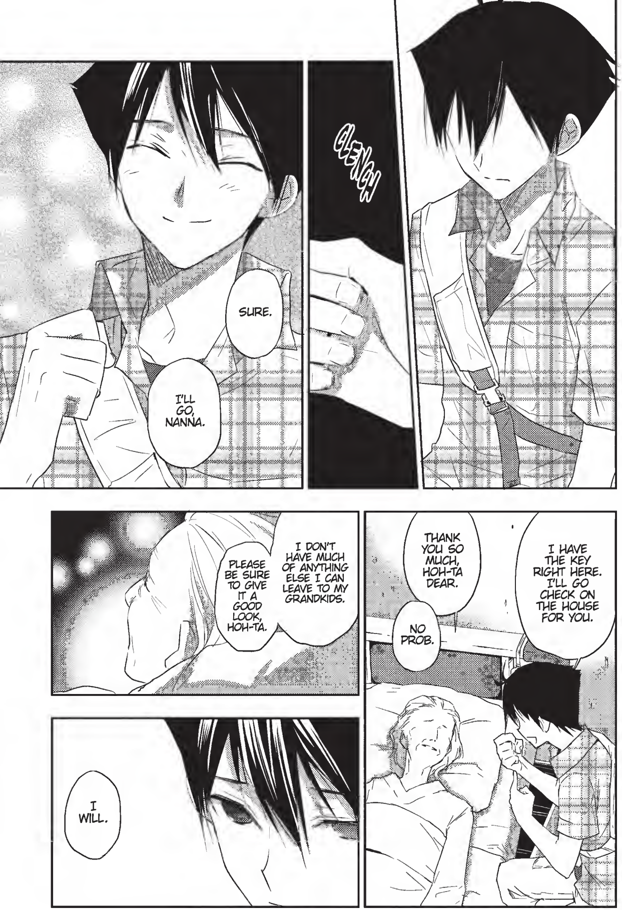

HOH-TA, I'M SORRY.
I'M SO SORRY ABOUT YOUR PAPA.
I TRIED, BUT THERE WASN'T A THING I COULD DO.
I'M SO SORRY, HOH-TA.
PLEASE... *FORGIVE* YOUR POOR PAPA...
NANNA...
IT'S OKAY. THAT WAS A LONG TIME AGO. I DON'T REALLY...

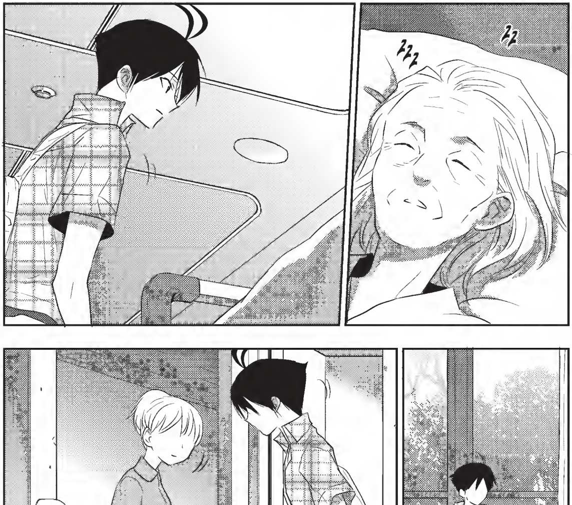

I KNEW IT.
THIS IS HARDER THAN I THOUGHT.
NANNA IS APOLOGIZING FOR DAD DYING EARLY...
BUT I CAN'T THINK OF ANYTHING TO SAY BACK. I CAN'T THINK OF MUCH TO SAY AT ALL, REALLY.
NOW WHAT DO I DO?
IS THIS THE PART WHERE I'M SUPPOSED TO COMFORT HER?
HOLD HER HAND?
WHAT IS EXPECTED OF ME HERE?
DRAWER...

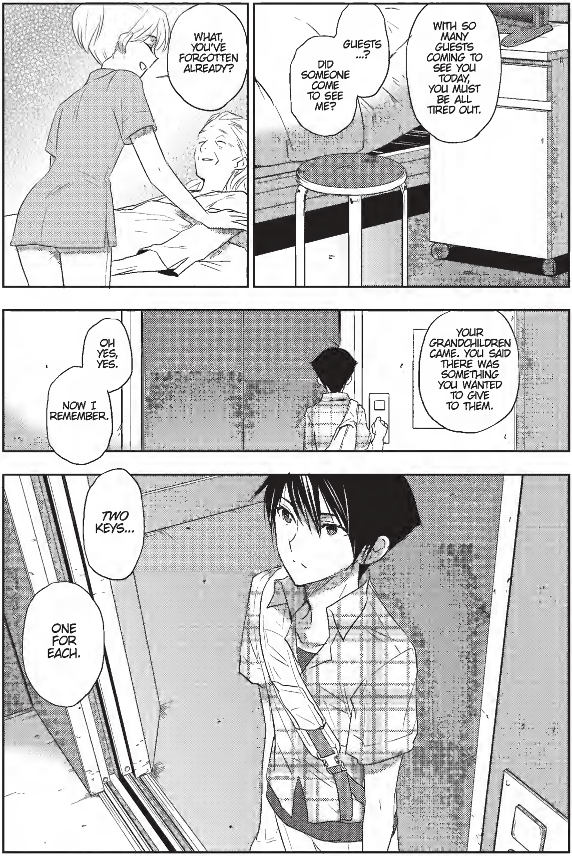

THE DRAWER ...
OPEN IT.
GO ON. I CAN'T MOVE ALL THAT WELL ANY MORE.
INSIDE...
ARE KEYS. DO YOU SEE THEM?

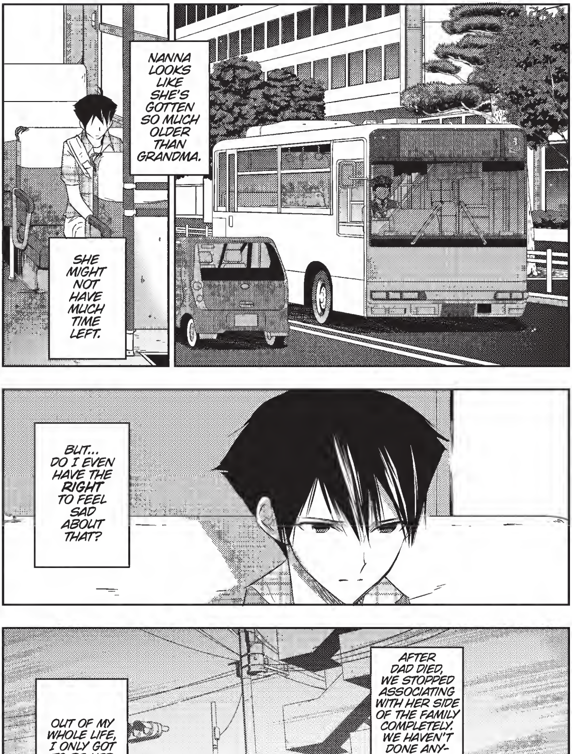

THERE SHOULD BE TWO.
ONE OF THEM IS FOR *YOU*, HOH-TA.
UH, NANNA? I ONLY SEE ONE...
THAT'S RIGHT... *TWO* KEYS.
KEYS TO THE OLD HOUSE ON THE MOUNTAIN.
I WANT YOU TO GO LOOK IN ON IT.
THE OLD HOUSE ON THE MOUNTAIN.
I CAN'T GET AROUND ALL THAT WELL ANYMORE, SO I CAN'T GO UP THERE.
I'M SO WORRIED IT'S FALLING APART.

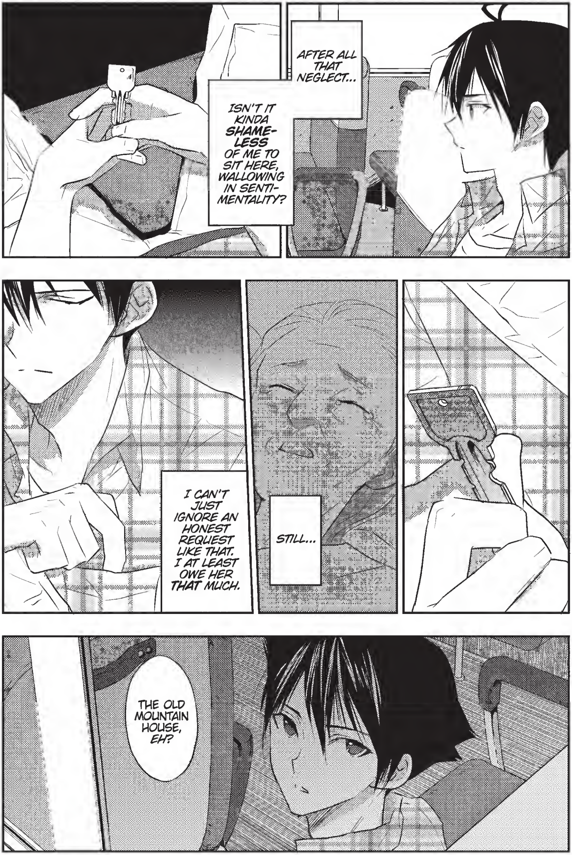

YOUR PAPA TOOK REAL GOOD CARE OF THAT OLD HOUSE.
IF IT CAN'T GO TO HIM, I WANT TO SEE IT GIVEN TO MY GRANDKIDS.
PLEASE, HOH-TA...
GO LOOK IN ON THAT OLD HOUSE.
IT'S ALL THE WAY UP IN THE MOUNTAINS, WHERE NOBODY GOES. I'M SO WORRIED ABOUT WHAT MIGHT HAVE HAPPENED TO IT.
"COME ON, HOTAKA.
"IT'LL BE ALL RIGHT."

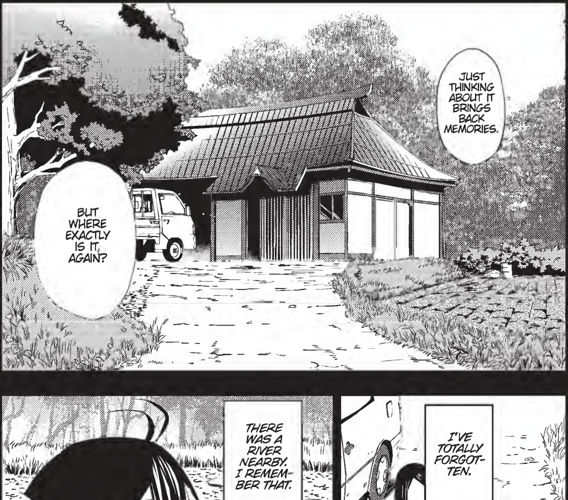

CLENCH
SURE.
I'LL GO, NANNA.
I HAVE THE KEY RIGHT HERE. I'LL GO CHECK ON THE HOUSE FOR YOU.
THANK YOU SO MUCH, HOH-TA DEAR.
NO PROB.
I DON'T HAVE MUCH OF ANYTHING ELSE I CAN LEAVE TO MY GRANDKIDS.
PLEASE BE SURE TO GIVE IT A GOOD LOOK, HOH-TA.
I WILL.

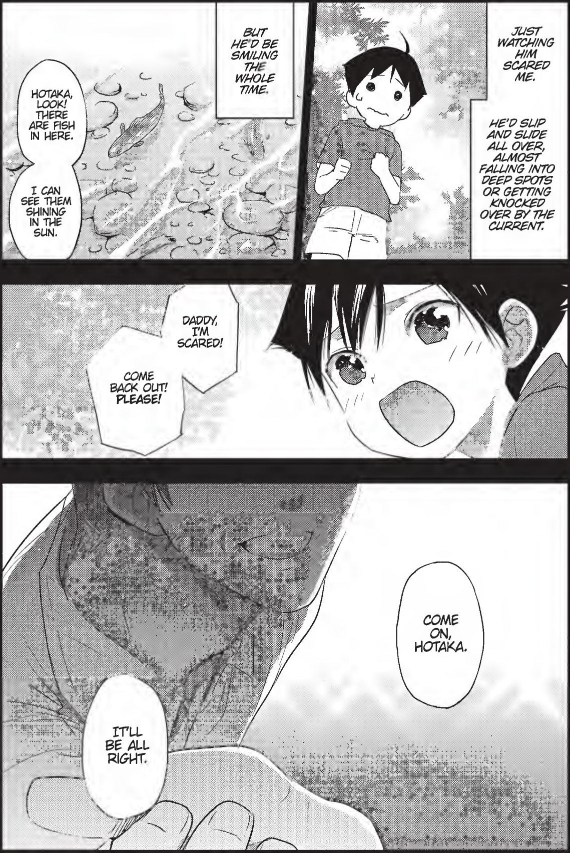

ZZ
ZZZ
TSURUOKA-SAN, HOW ARE YOU FEELING?
TODAY WAS A HAPPY DAY FOR YOU, WASN'T IT?

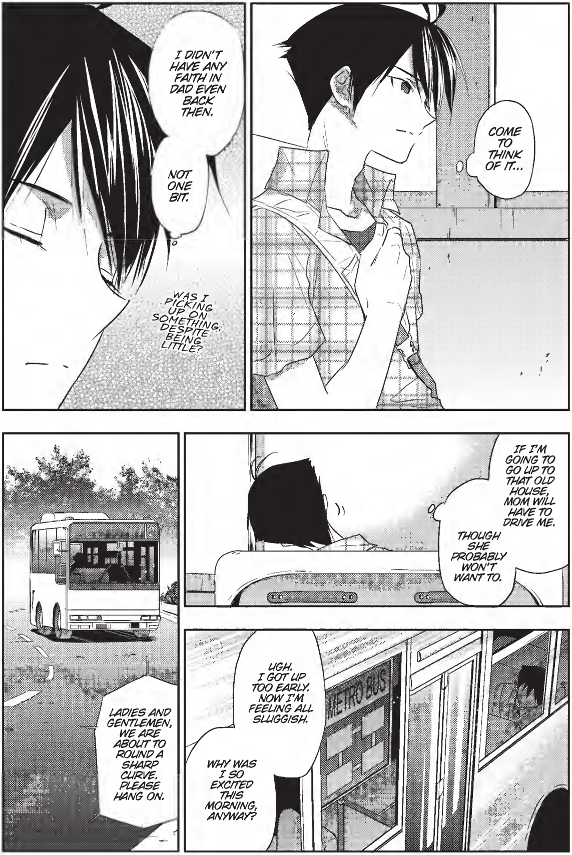

WITH SO MANY GUESTS COMING TO SEE YOU TODAY, YOU MUST BE ALL TIRED OUT.
GUESTS ...?
DID SOMEONE COME TO SEE ME?
WHAT, YOU'VE FORGOTTEN ALREADY?
YOUR GRANDCHILDREN CAME. YOU SAID THERE WAS SOMETHING YOU WANTED TO GIVE TO THEM.
OH YES, YES.
NOW I REMEMBER.
TWO KEYS...
ONE FOR EACH.

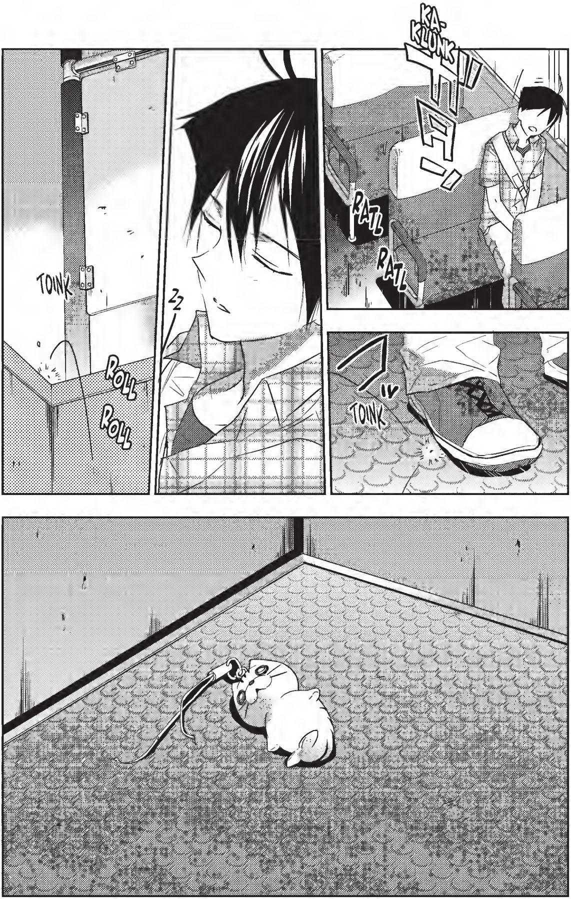

NANNA LOOKS LIKE SHE'S GOTTEN SO MUCH OLDER THAN GRANDMA.
SHE MIGHT NOT HAVE MUCH TIME LEFT.
BUT... DO I EVEN HAVE THE **RIGHT** TO FEEL SAD ABOUT THAT?
AFTER DAD DIED, WE STOPPED ASSOCIATING WITH HER SIDE OF THE FAMILY COMPLETELY. WE HAVEN'T DONE ANYTHING TO TAKE CARE OF HER.
OUT OF MY WHOLE LIFE, I ONLY GOT TO BE HER GRANDSON FOR A VERY SHORT TIME.


AFTER ALL THAT NEGLECT...
ISN'T IT KINDA SHAMELESS OF ME TO SIT HERE, WALLOWING IN SENTIMENTALITY?
STILL...
I CAN'T JUST IGNORE AN HONEST REQUEST LIKE THAT. I AT LEAST OWE HER THAT MUCH.
THE OLD MOUNTAIN HOUSE, EH?

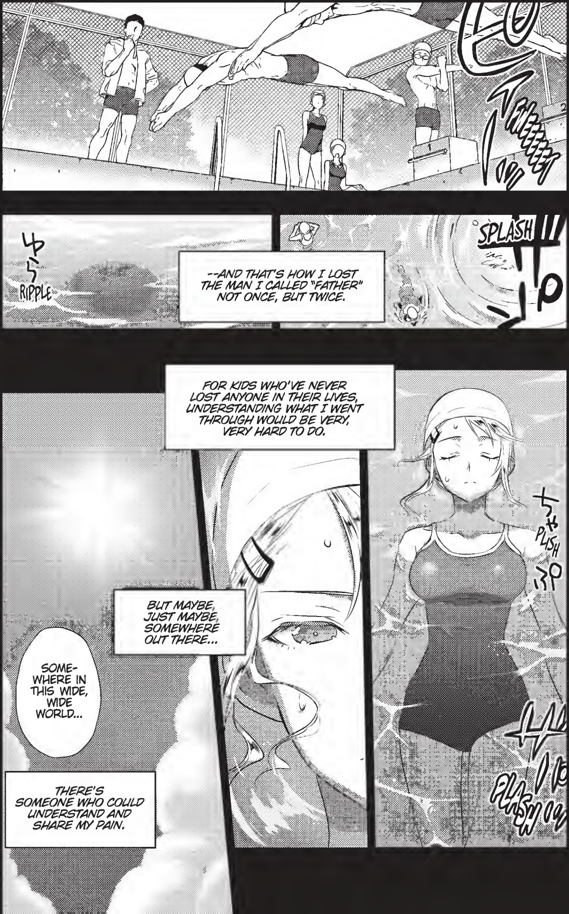

JUST THINKING ABOUT IT BRINGS BACK MEMORIES.
BUT WHERE EXACTLY IS IT AGAIN?
I'VE TOTALLY FORGOTTEN.
I VAGUELY REMEMBER US GOING TO VISIT AS A FAMILY A FEW TIMES.
THERE WAS A RIVER NEARBY. I REMEMBER THAT.
DAD WOULD GO OUT AND WADE IN IT.

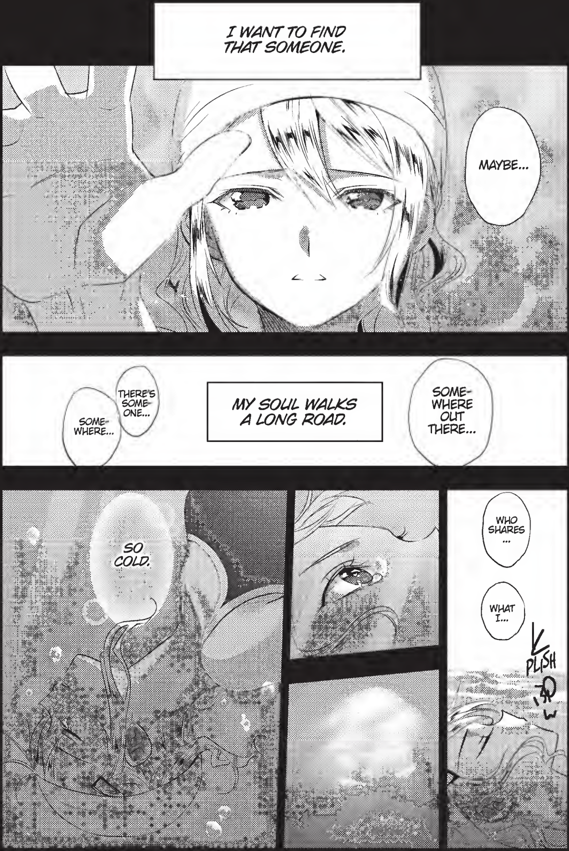

JUST WATCHING HIM SCARED ME.
HE'D SLIP AND SLIDE ALL OVER, ALMOST FALLING INTO DEEP SPOTS OR GETTING KNOCKED OVER BY THE CURRENT.
BUT HE'D BE SMILING THE WHOLE TIME.
HOTAKA, LOOK! THERE ARE FISH IN HERE.
I CAN SEE THEM SHINING IN THE SUN.
DADDY, I'M SCARED!
COME BACK OUT! PLEASE!
COME ON, HOTAKA.
IT'LL BE ALL RIGHT.

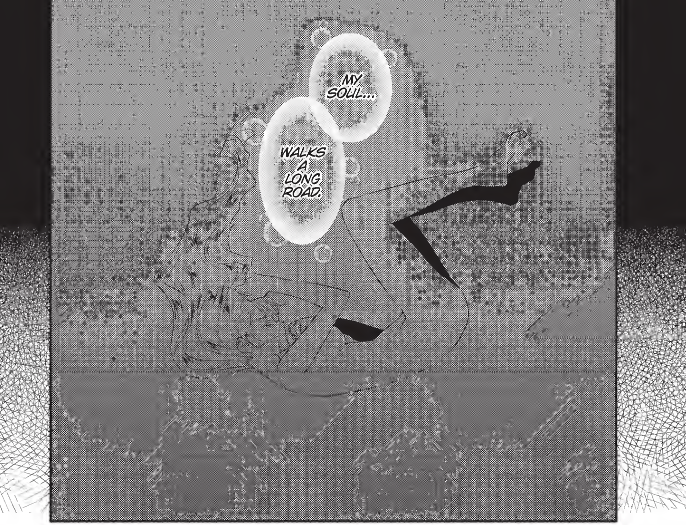

COME TO THINK OF IT...
I DIDN'T HAVE ANY FAITH IN DAD EVEN BACK THEN.
NOT ONE BIT.
WAS I PICKING UP ON SOMETHING, DESPITE BEING LITTLE?
IF I'M GOING TO GO UP TO THAT OLD HOUSE, MOM WILL HAVE TO DRIVE ME.
THOUGH SHE PROBABLY WON'T WANT TO.
METRO BUS
UGH. I GOT UP TOO EARLY. NOW I'M FEELING ALL SLUGGISH.
WHY WAS I SO EXCITED THIS MORNING, ANYWAY?
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, WE ARE ABOUT TO ROUND A SHARP CURVE. PLEASE HANG ON.


KA-KLUNK!!
ガタン!!
RATTL
RATTL
TOINK
ZZ
TOINK
ROLL
ROLL

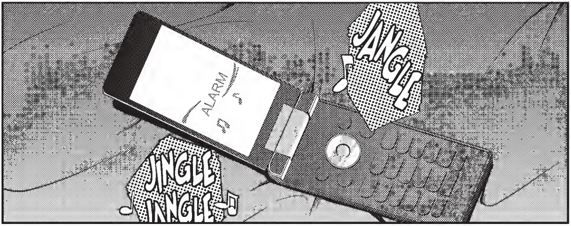
YEAH! ☆

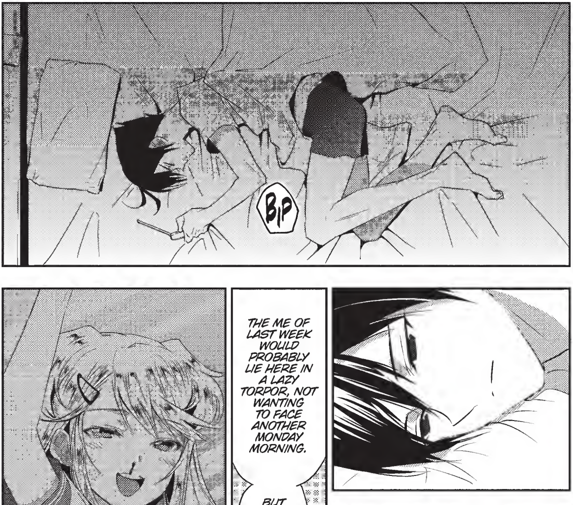

FWEEEEEET
SPLASH
--AND THAT'S HOW I LOST THE MAN I CALLED "FATHER" NOT ONCE, BUT TWICE.
ゆら
RIPPLE
FOR KIDS WHO'VE NEVER LOST ANYONE IN THEIR LIVES, UNDERSTANDING WHAT I WENT THROUGH WOULD BE VERY, VERY HARD TO DO.
ちゃぷ
PLISH
PLASH
BUT MAYBE, JUST MAYBE, SOMEWHERE OUT THERE...
SOME-WHERE IN THIS WIDE, WIDE WORLD...
THERE'S SOMEONE WHO COULD UNDERSTAND AND SHARE MY PAIN.

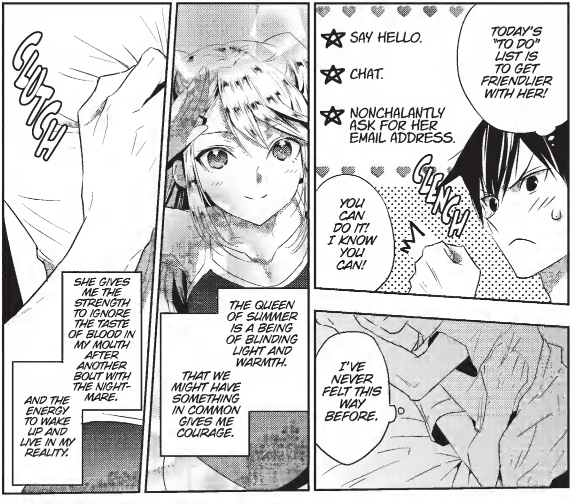

I WANT TO FIND THAT SOMEONE.
MAYBE...
SOMEWHERE OUT THERE...
MY SOUL WALKS A LONG ROAD.
THERE'S SOMEONE...
SOMEWHERE...
WHO SHARES...
WHAT I...
PLISH
SO COLD.

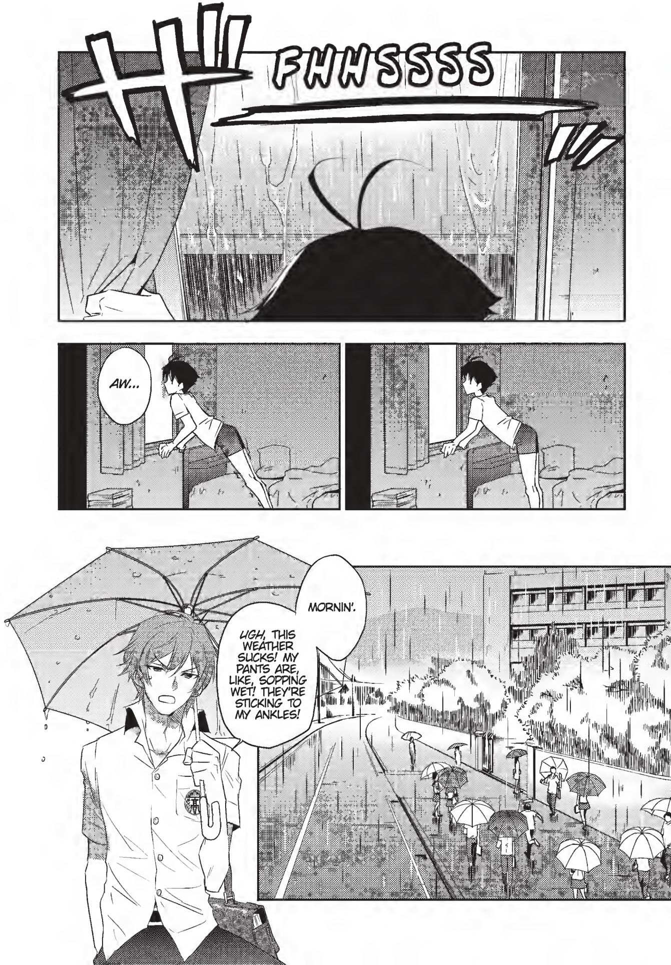

MY SOUL...
WALKS A LONG ROAD.

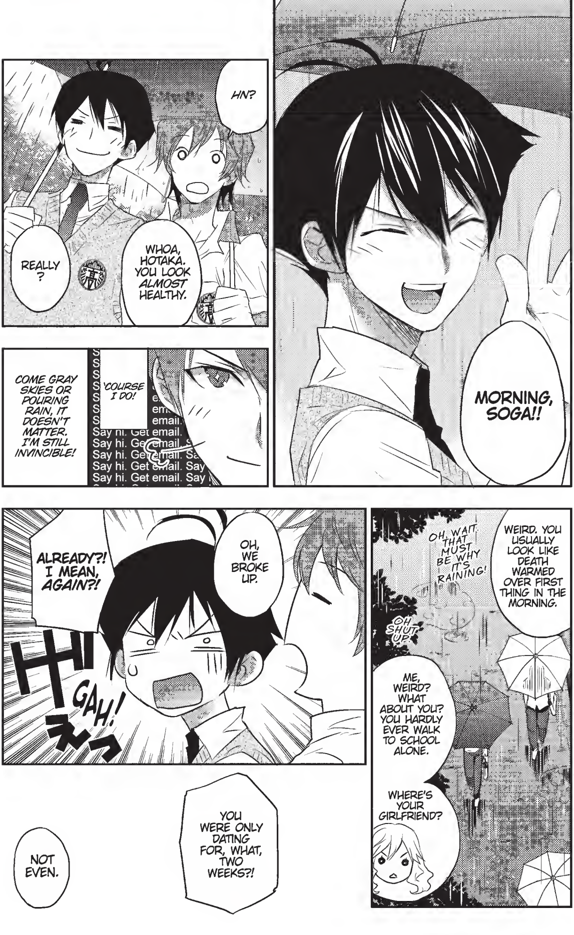
Chapter 5: Blue Rain

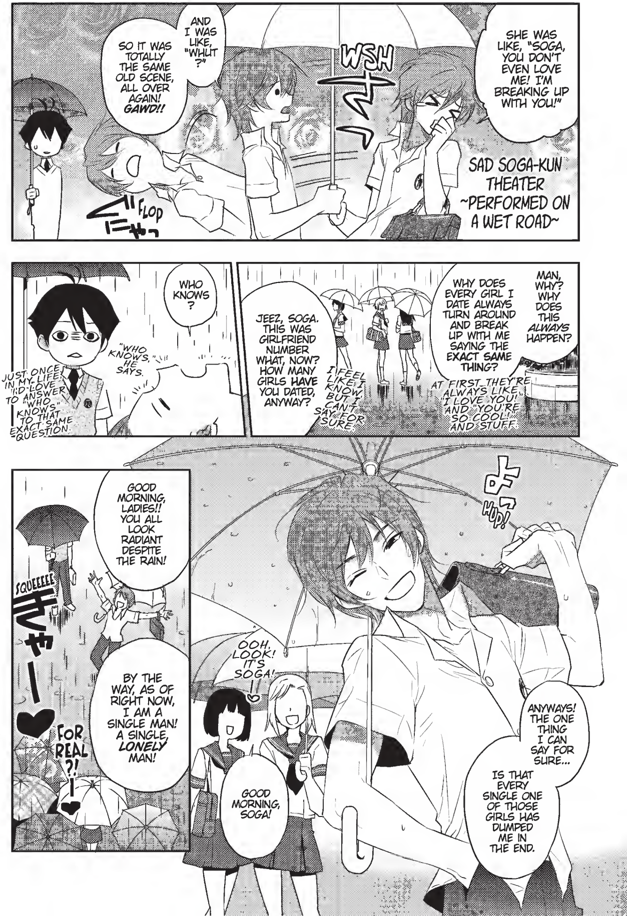

JANGLE
ALARM
JINGLE JINGLE

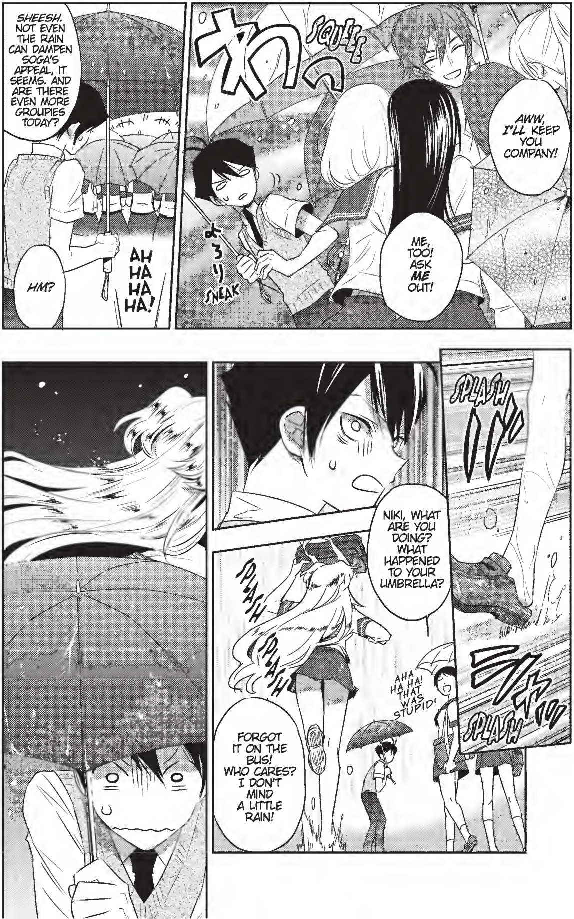

BIP
THE ME OF LAST WEEK WOULD PROBABLY LIE HERE IN A LAZY TORPOR, NOT WANTING TO FACE ANOTHER MONDAY MORNING.
BUT TODAY, IT'S A NEW ME.
SMAK
GRIN
FINALLY! THE MORNING I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR!
THE ME OF TODAY...
IS FRIENDS WITH AWAYA NIKI!

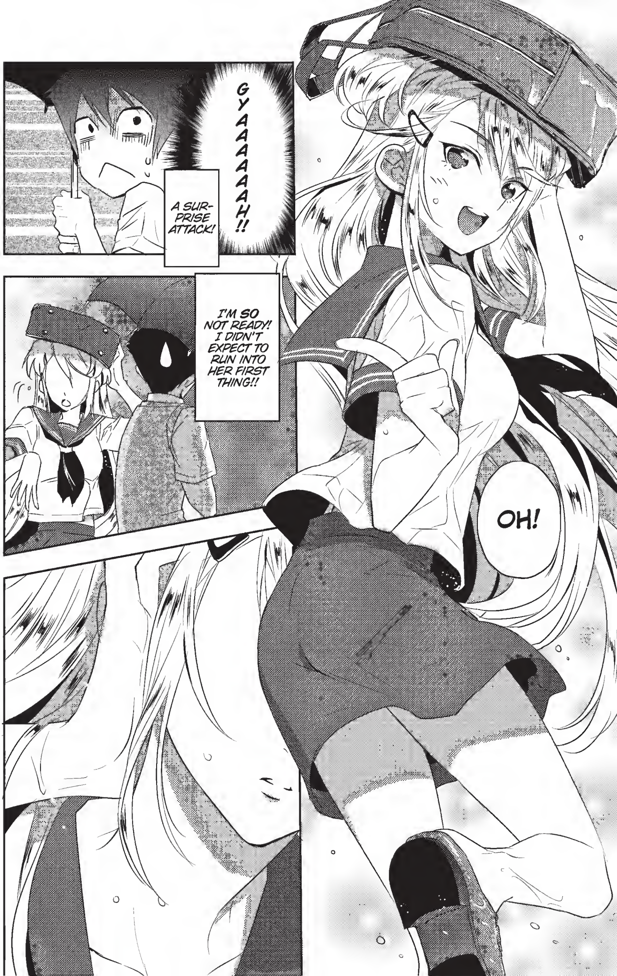

TODAY'S "TO DO" LIST IS TO GET FRIENDLIER WITH HER!
☆ SAY HELLO.
☆ CHAT.
☆ NONCHALANTLY ASK FOR HER EMAIL ADDRESS.
CLENCH
YOU CAN DO IT! I KNOW YOU CAN!
I'VE NEVER FELT THIS WAY BEFORE.
THE QUEEN OF SUMMER IS A BEING OF BLINDING LIGHT AND WARMTH.
THAT WE MIGHT HAVE SOMETHING IN COMMON GIVES ME COURAGE.
CLUTCH
SHE GIVES ME THE STRENGTH TO IGNORE THE TASTE OF BLOOD IN MY MOUTH AFTER ANOTHER BOUT WITH THE NIGHT-MARE.
AND THE ENERGY TO WAKE UP AND LIVE IN MY REALITY.
LET'S DO THIS!!
がばっ
FLOMP
WELCOME, MORNING SUNLIGHT!!
SHHK
シャッ

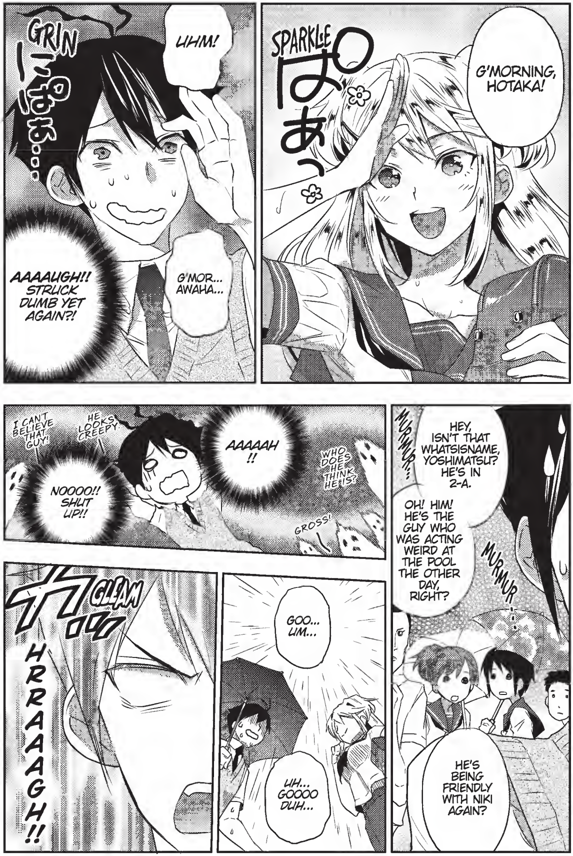

FHHSSSS
AW...
MORNIN'.
UGH, THIS WEATHER SUCKS! MY PANTS ARE, LIKE, SOPPING WET! THEY'RE STICKING TO MY ANKLES!

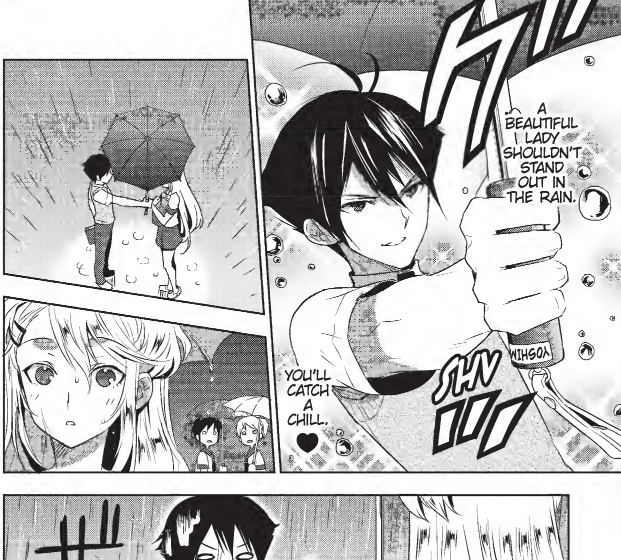

MORNING, SOGA!!
HN?
WHOA, HOTAKA. YOU LOOK *ALMOST* HEALTHY.
REALLY?
'COURSE I DO!
COME GRAY SKIES OR POURING RAIN, IT DOESN'T MATTER. I'M STILL INVINCIBLE!
Say hi. Get email. Say hi. Get email.
Say hi. Get email. Say hi. Get email.
Say hi. Get email. Say hi. Get email.
WEIRD. YOU USUALLY LOOK LIKE DEATH WARMED OVER FIRST THING IN THE MORNING.
OH, WAIT. THAT MUST BE WHY IT'S RAINING!
OH SHUT UP.
ME, WEIRD? WHAT ABOUT YOU? YOU HARDLY EVER WALK TO SCHOOL ALONE.
WHERE'S YOUR GIRLFRIEND?
OH, WE BROKE UP.
ALREADY?! I MEAN, *AGAIN*?!
HI GAH!
えっ
YOU WERE ONLY DATING FOR, WHAT, TWO WEEKS?!
NOT EVEN.

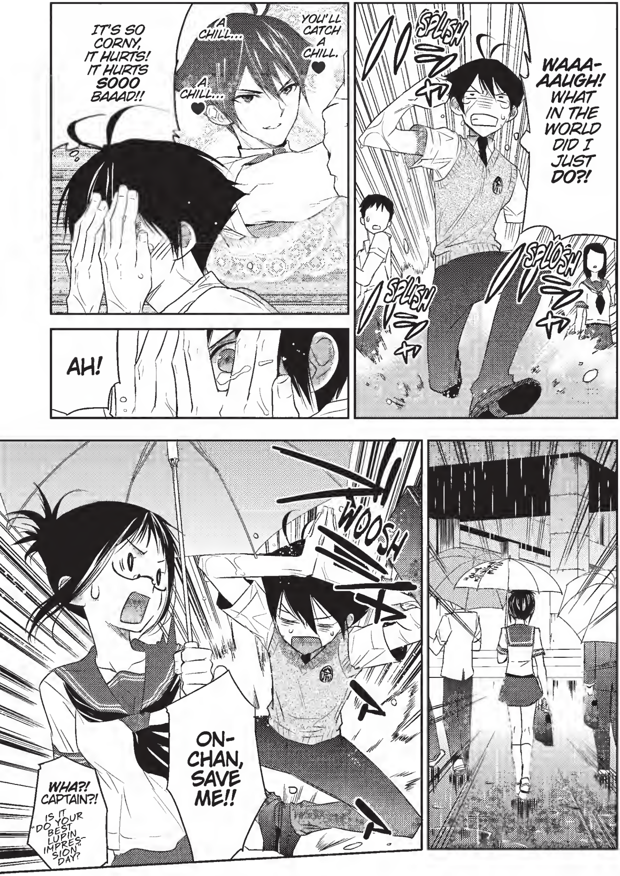

SHE WAS LIKE, "SOGA, YOU DON'T EVEN LOVE ME! I'M BREAKING UP WITH YOU!"
WSH さっ
AND I WAS LIKE, "WHUT?"
SO IT WAS TOTALLY THE SAME OLD SCENE, ALL OVER AGAIN! *GAWD!!*
FLOP ぐにゃっ
SAD SOGA-KUN THEATER ~PERFORMED ON A WET ROAD~
MAN, WHY? WHY DOES THIS *ALWAYS* HAPPEN?
WHY DOES EVERY GIRL I DATE ALWAYS TURN AROUND AND BREAK UP WITH ME SAYING THE **EXACT SAME** THING?
AT FIRST THEY'RE ALWAYS LIKE "I LOVE YOU!" AND "YOU'RE SO COOL!" AND STUFF.
JEEZ, SOGA. THIS WAS GIRLFRIEND NUMBER WHAT, NOW? HOW MANY GIRLS **HAVE** YOU DATED, ANYWAY?
I FEEL LIKE I KNOW, BUT I CAN'T SAY FOR SURE.
WHO KNOWS?
"WHO KNOWS," HE SAYS.
JUST ONCE IN MY LIFE I'D LOVE TO ANSWER "WHO KNOWS" TO THAT EXACT SAME QUESTION.
よっ HUP!
ANYWAYS! THE ONE THING I CAN SAY FOR SURE...
IS THAT EVERY SINGLE ONE OF THOSE GIRLS HAS DUMPED ME IN THE END.
OOH, LOOK! IT'S SOGA!♥
GOOD MORNING, SOGA!
GOOD MORNING, LADIES!! YOU ALL LOOK RADIANT DESPITE THE RAIN!
BY THE WAY, AS OF RIGHT NOW, I AM A SINGLE MAN! A SINGLE, *LONELY* MAN!
SQUEEEEE きゃー♥
FOR REAL?!♥

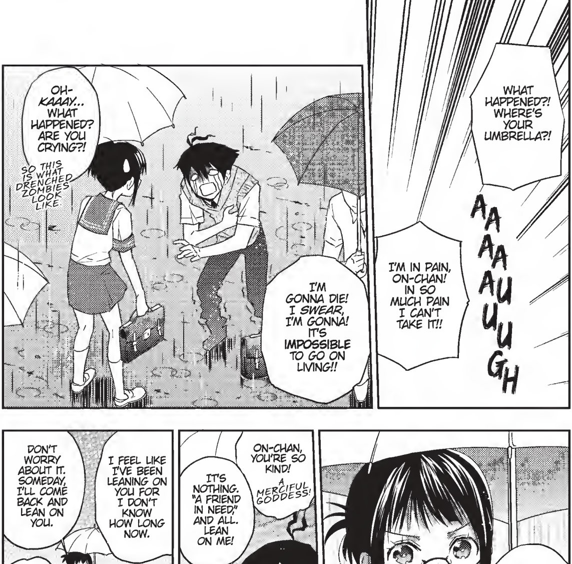

わっ
SQUEEEE
AWW, I'LL KEEP YOU COMPANY!
ME, TOO! ASK ME OUT!
よろり
SNEAK
AH HA HA HA!
SHEESH. NOT EVEN THE RAIN CAN DAMPEN SOGA'S APPEAL, IT SEEMS. AND ARE THERE EVEN MORE GROUPIES TODAY?
HM?
SPLASH
SPLASH
NIKI, WHAT ARE YOU DOING? WHAT HAPPENED TO YOUR UMBRELLA?
SPLASH
SPLASH
SPLASH
FORGOT IT ON THE BUS! WHO CARES? I DON'T MIND A LITTLE RAIN!
AHA HA HA! THAT WAS STUPID!


GYAAAAAAAH!!
A SURPRISE ATTACK!
I'M SO NOT READY! I DIDN'T EXPECT TO RUN INTO HER FIRST THING!!
OH!

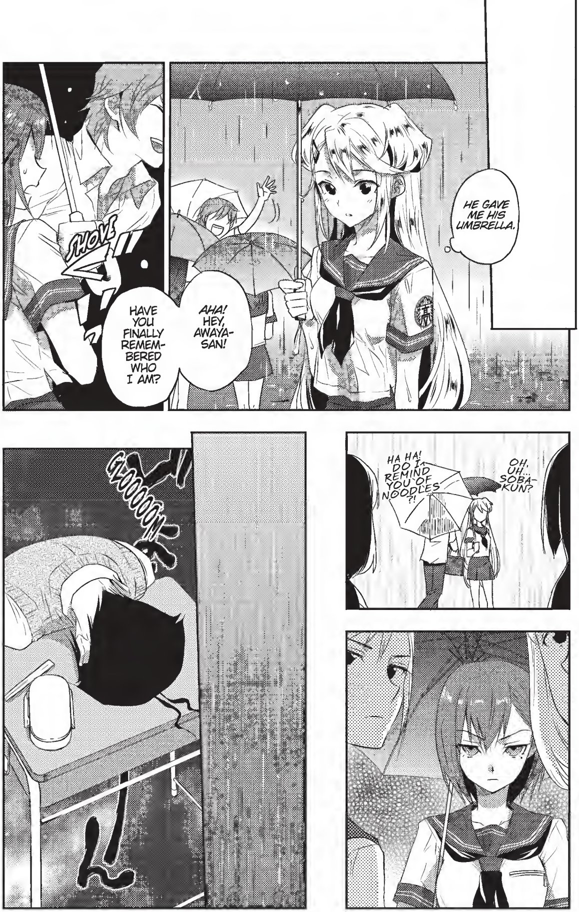

SPARKLE
ぱあっ
G'MORNING, HOTAKA!
UHM!
GRIN
にぱあ…
G'MOR... AWAHA...
AAAAUGH!! STRUCK DUMB YET AGAIN?!
MURMUR
HEY, ISN'T THAT WHATSISNAME, YOSHIMATSU? HE'S IN 2-A.
OH! HIM! HE'S THE GUY WHO WAS ACTING WEIRD AT THE POOL THE OTHER DAY, RIGHT?
MURMUR
HE'S BEING FRIENDLY WITH NIKI AGAIN?
AAAAAH!!
WHO DOES HE THINK HE IS?
GROSS!
HE LOOKS CREEPY.
I CAN'T BELIEVE THAT GUY!
NOOOO!! SHUT UP!!
GOO... UM...
UH... GOOOO DUH...
GLEAM
HRRAAAAGH!!

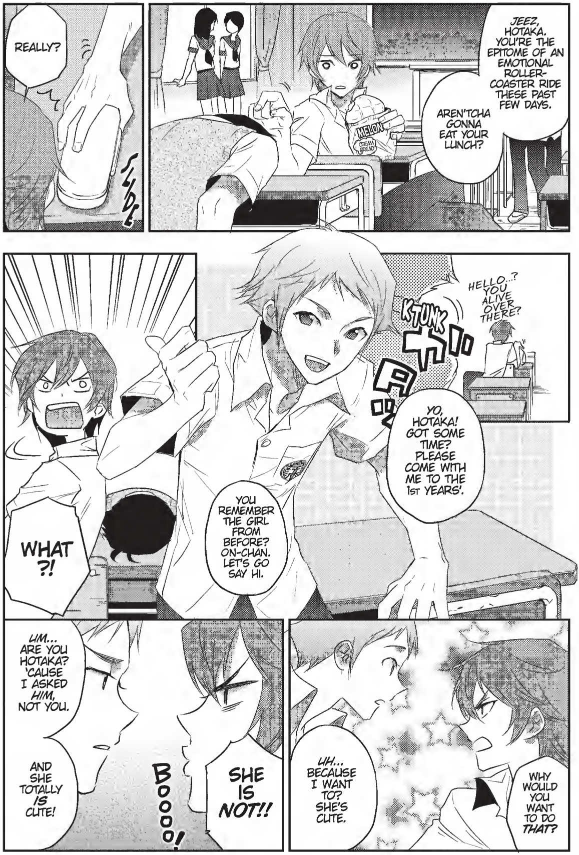

A BEAUTIFUL LADY SHOULDN'T STAND OUT IN THE RAIN.
YOU'LL CATCH A CHILL. ♥
SHN
FSSSSSS
SEE 'YA!!
WAVE

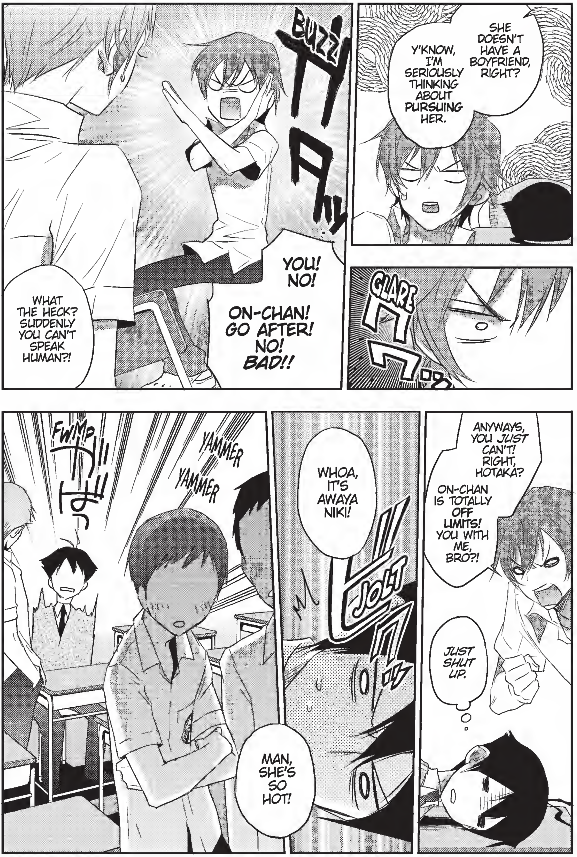

SPLISH
WAAAAAUGH! WHAT IN THE WORLD DID I JUST DO?!
SPLOSH
SPLISH
YOU'LL CATCH A CHILL. ♥
A CHILL...
A CHILL... ♥
IT'S SO CORNY, IT HURTS! IT HURTS SOOO BAAAD!!
AH!
WOOSH
ON-CHAN, SAVE ME!!
WHA?! CAPTAIN?!
IS IT "DO YOUR BEST LUPIN IMPRESSION" DAY?

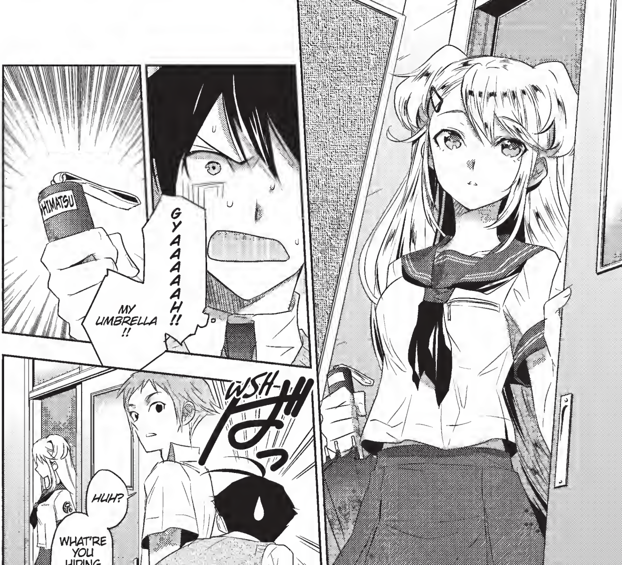

WHAT HAPPENED?! WHERE'S YOUR UMBRELLA?!
AAAAAUUUGH
I'M IN PAIN, ON-CHAN! IN SO MUCH PAIN I CAN'T TAKE IT!!
OH-KAAAY... WHAT HAPPENED? ARE YOU CRYING?!
SO THIS IS WHAT DRENCHED ZOMBIES LOOK LIKE.
I'M GONNA DIE! I SWEAR, I'M GONNA! IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO GO ON LIVING!!
A-ANYWAY! IF YOU WOULD DEIGN TO TAKE THE HAND OF ONE SO LOWLY AS I, PLEASE GO AHEAD!
LIVE, CAPTAIN! DON'T GIVE UP ON LIFE!
ON-CHAN, YOU'RE SO KIND!
A MERCIFUL GODDESS!
IT'S NOTHING. "A FRIEND IN NEED," AND ALL. LEAN ON ME!
I FEEL LIKE I'VE BEEN LEANING ON YOU FOR I DON'T KNOW HOW LONG NOW.
DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT. SOMEDAY, I'LL COME BACK AND LEAN ON YOU.
ON-CHAN...!!
SUCH MANLY WORDS!!
WHEN THAT DAY COMES, ON-CHAN, DON'T HESITATE. I SWEAR I'LL HOLD UP YOUR ENTIRE 50 KG FRAME!
I AM NOT THAT HEAVY!
NOT EVEN CLOSE!

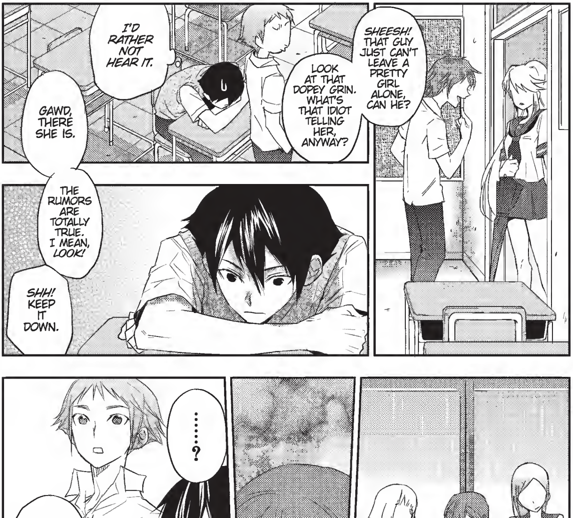
*50 kg = 110 lbs.

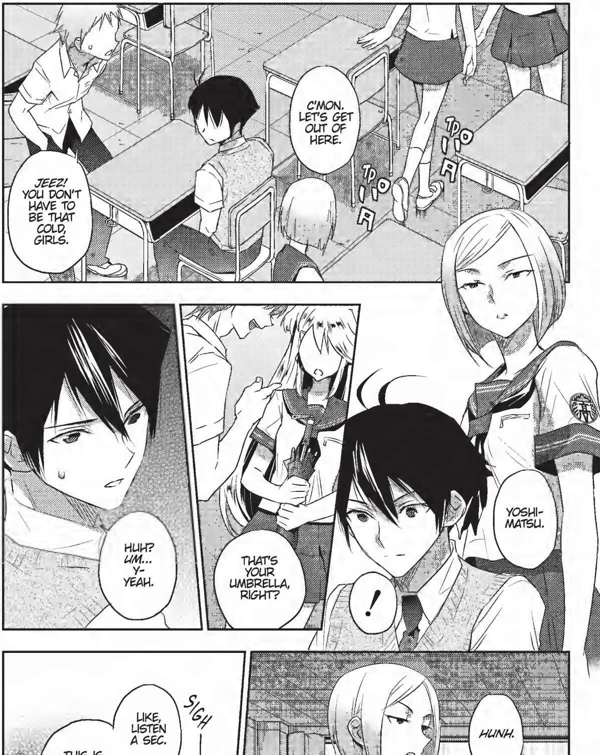

HE GAVE ME HIS UMBRELLA.
AHA! HEY, AWAYA-SAN!
SHOVE
HAVE YOU FINALLY REMEMBERED WHO I AM?
OH, UH... SOBA-KUN?
HA HA! DO I REMIND YOU OF NOODLES?!
GLOOOOOM

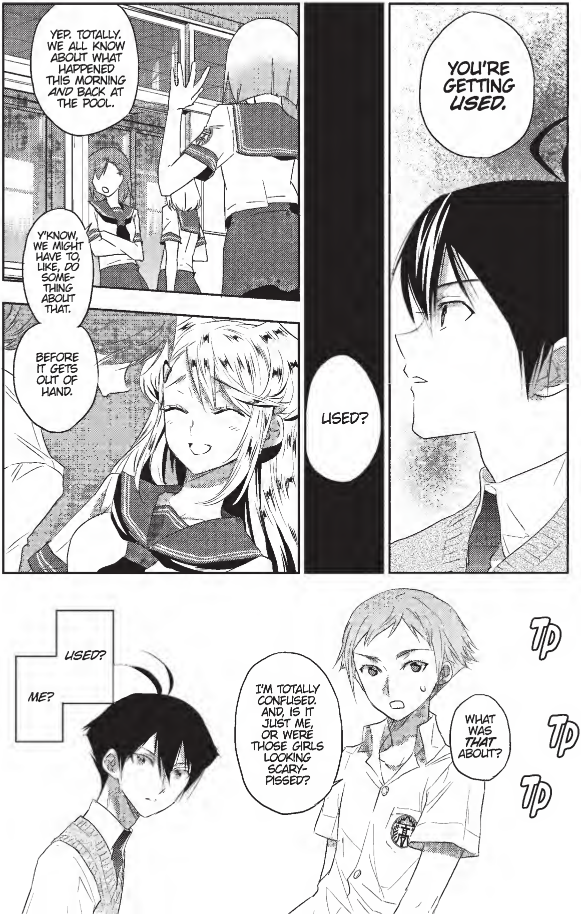

JEEZ, HOTAKA. YOU'RE THE EPITOME OF AN EMOTIONAL ROLLER-COASTER RIDE THESE PAST FEW DAYS.
AREN'TCHA GONNA EAT YOUR LUNCH?
MELON CREAM BREAD
REALLY?
SLIDE
HELLO...? YOU ALIVE OVER THERE?
KTUNK
YO, HOTAKA! GOT SOME TIME? PLEASE COME WITH ME TO THE 1st YEARS'.
YOU REMEMBER THE GIRL FROM BEFORE? ON-CHAN. LET'S GO SAY HI.
WHAT?!
WHY WOULD YOU WANT TO DO *THAT*?
UH... BECAUSE I WANT TO? SHE'S CUTE.
UM... ARE YOU HOTAKA? 'CAUSE I ASKED *HIM*, NOT YOU.
SHE IS *NOT!!*
AND SHE TOTALLY *IS* CUTE!
BOOOO!

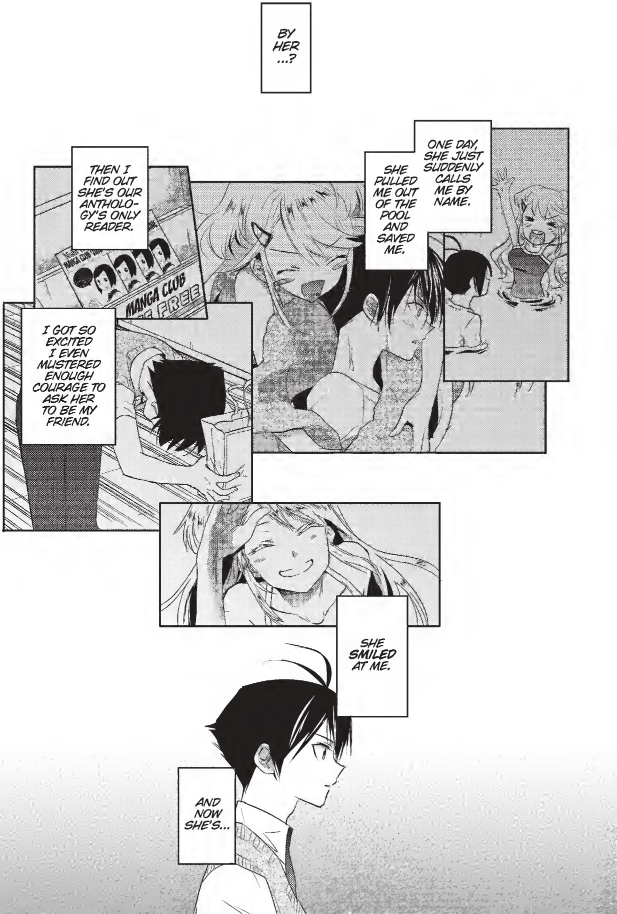

SHE DOESN'T HAVE A BOYFRIEND, RIGHT?
Y'KNOW, I'M SERIOUSLY THINKING ABOUT PURSUING HER.
GLARE
BUZZ
YOU! NO!
ON-CHAN! GO AFTER! NO! BAD!!
WHAT THE HECK? SUDDENLY YOU CAN'T SPEAK HUMAN?!
ANYWAYS, YOU JUST CAN'T! RIGHT, HOTAKA?
ON-CHAN IS TOTALLY OFF LIMITS! YOU WITH ME, BRO?!
JUST SHUT UP.
WHOA, IT'S AWAYA NIKI!
JOLT
FWMP
YAMMER
YAMMER
MAN, SHE'S SO HOT!

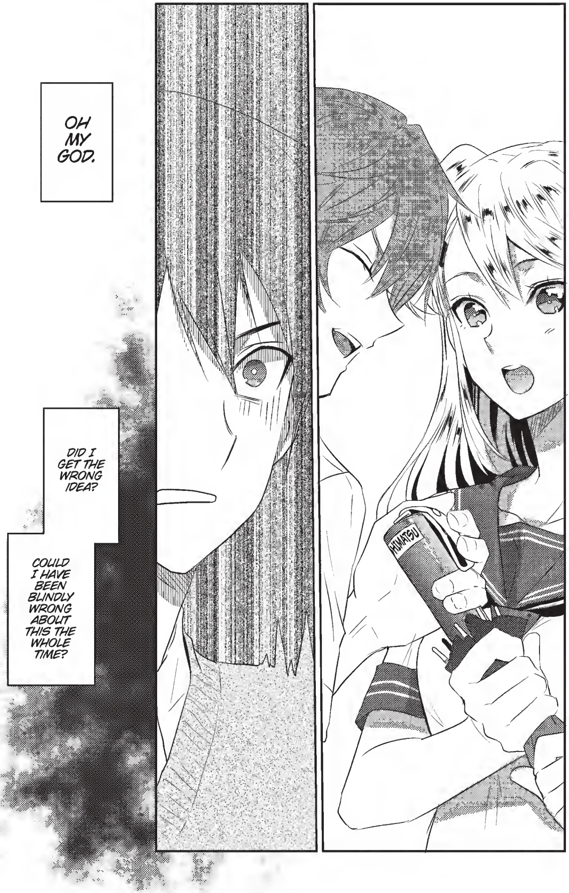

HIMATSU
GYAAAAAAH!!
MY UMBRELLA!!
WSH- ぱっ
HUH?
WHAT'RE YOU HIDING FOR?
WAVE ぱっ
OH, HEY! IT'S AWAYA-SAN!
WHAT'S SHE DOING HERE? DOES SHE NEED HELP? I'LL GO HELP!
WELL, SOMEBODY'S AN ATTENTION HOG.
SERIOUSLY, WHAT'S UP WITH THE BOTH OF YOU?
LOOKIT ME, LOOKIT ME!

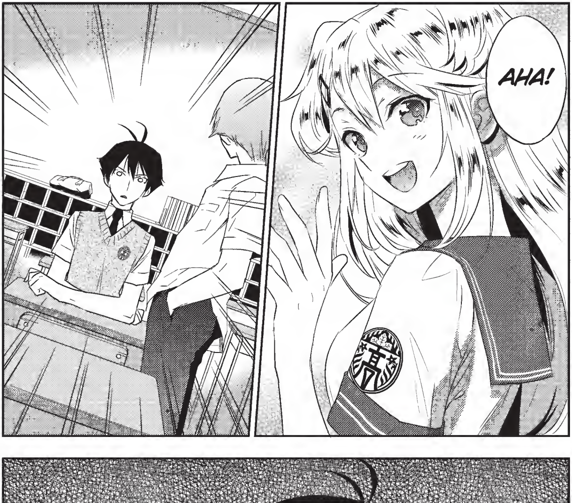

SHEESH! THAT GUY JUST CAN'T LEAVE A PRETTY GIRL ALONE, CAN HE?
LOOK AT THAT DOPEY GRIN. WHAT'S THAT IDIOT TELLING HER, ANYWAY?
I'D RATHER NOT HEAR IT.
GAWD, THERE SHE IS.
THE RUMORS ARE TOTALLY TRUE. I MEAN, *LOOK!*
SHH! KEEP IT DOWN.
……?
WHAT WAS THAT? WHAT RUMOR?
HMP! NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS, YOU!

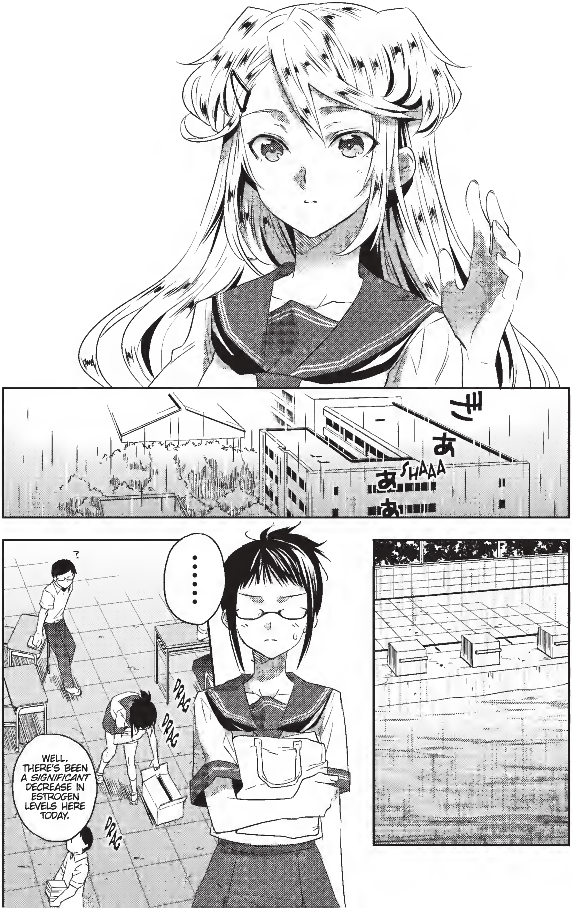

C'MON. LET'S GET OUT OF HERE.
JEEZ! YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE THAT COLD, GIRLS.
YOSHI-MATSU.
!
THAT'S YOUR UMBRELLA, RIGHT?
HUH? UM... Y-YEAH.
HUNH.
SIGH
LIKE, LISTEN A SEC.
THIS IS... WELL, IT'S A WARNING, I GUESS.

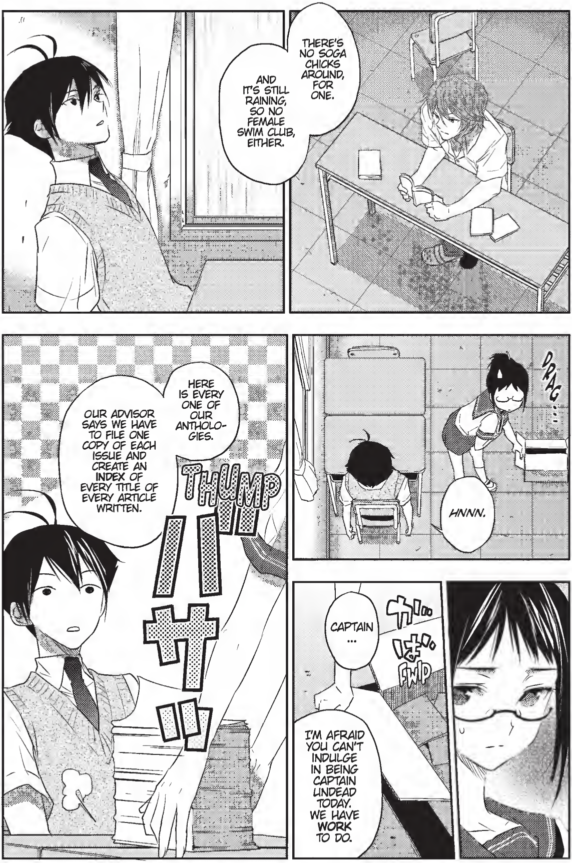

YOU'RE GETTING *USED.*
USED?
YEP. TOTALLY. WE ALL KNOW ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED THIS MORNING *AND* BACK AT THE POOL.
Y'KNOW, WE MIGHT HAVE TO, LIKE, *DO* SOMETHING ABOUT THAT.
BEFORE IT GETS OUT OF HAND.
TP
TP
TP
WHAT WAS *THAT* ABOUT?
I'M TOTALLY CONFUSED. AND, IS IT JUST ME, OR WERE THOSE GIRLS LOOKING SCARY-PISSED?
USED?
ME?

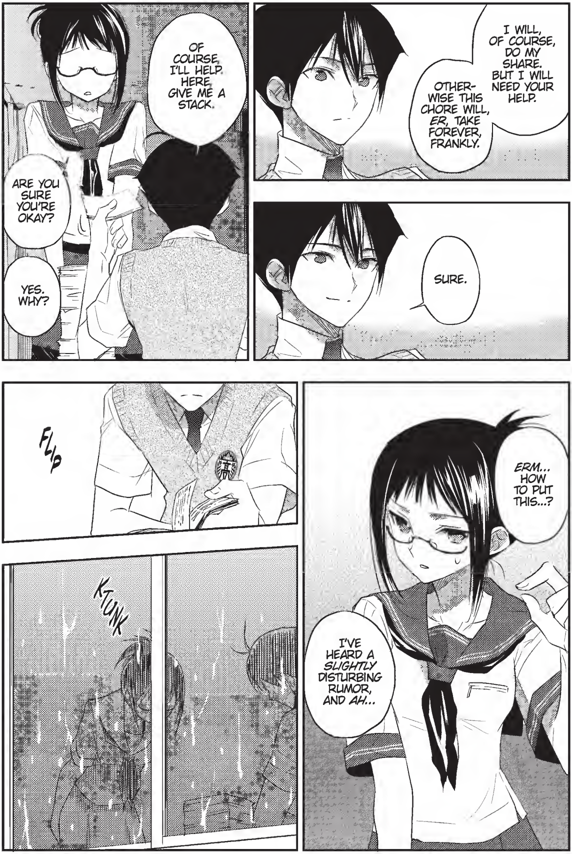

BY HER ...?
ONE DAY, SHE JUST SUDDENLY CALLS ME BY NAME.
SHE PULLED ME OUT OF THE POOL AND SAVED ME.
THEN I FIND OUT SHE'S OUR ANTHOLOGY'S ONLY READER.
MANGA CLUB
MANGA CLUB
FREE
I GOT SO EXCITED I EVEN MUSTERED ENOUGH COURAGE TO ASK HER TO BE MY FRIEND.
SHE SMILED AT ME.
AND NOW SHE'S...

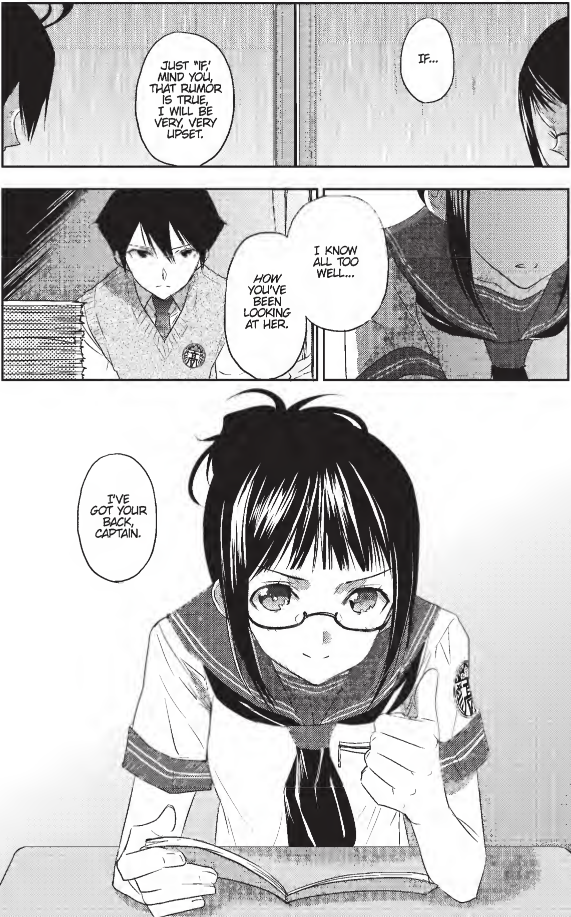

HIMATSU
OH MY GOD.
DID I GET THE WRONG IDEA?
COULD I HAVE BEEN BLINDLY WRONG ABOUT THIS THE WHOLE TIME?

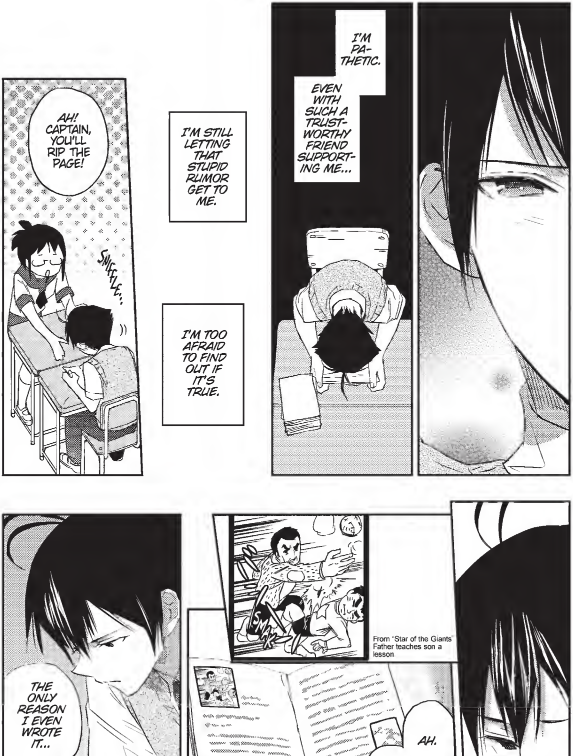

AHA!


ざあああ
SHAAA
?
……
DRAG
DRAG
WELL. THERE'S BEEN A *SIGNIFICANT* DECREASE IN ESTROGEN LEVELS HERE TODAY.
DRAG

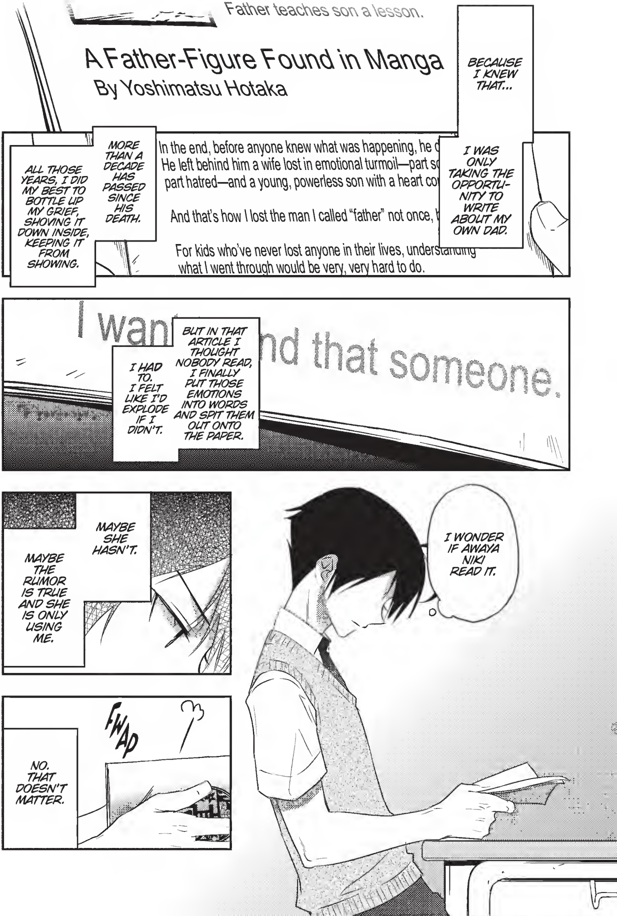

THERE'S NO SOGA CHICKS AROUND, FOR ONE.
AND IT'S STILL RAINING, SO NO FEMALE SWIM CLUB, EITHER.
DRAG...
HNNN.
HERE IS EVERY ONE OF OUR ANTHOLOGIES.
OUR ADVISOR SAYS WE HAVE TO FILE ONE COPY OF EACH ISSUE AND CREATE AN INDEX OF EVERY TITLE OF EVERY ARTICLE WRITTEN.
THUMP
ドサッ
ガバ
FWIP
CAPTAIN...
I'M AFRAID YOU CAN'T INDULGE IN BEING CAPTAIN UNDEAD TODAY. WE HAVE **WORK** TO DO.

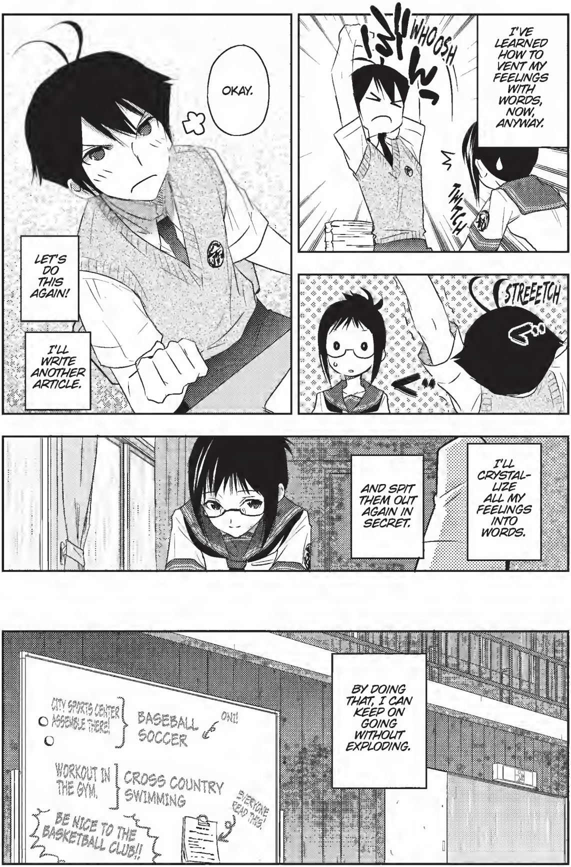

I WILL, OF COURSE, DO MY SHARE. BUT I WILL NEED YOUR HELP.
OTHER-WISE THIS CHORE WILL, *ER*, TAKE FOREVER, FRANKLY.
OF COURSE, I'LL HELP. HERE, GIVE ME A STACK.
SURE.
ARE YOU SURE YOU'RE OKAY?
YES. WHY?
ERM... HOW TO PUT THIS...?
I'VE HEARD A *SLIGHTLY* DISTURBING RUMOR, AND *AH*...
FLIP
KTUNK

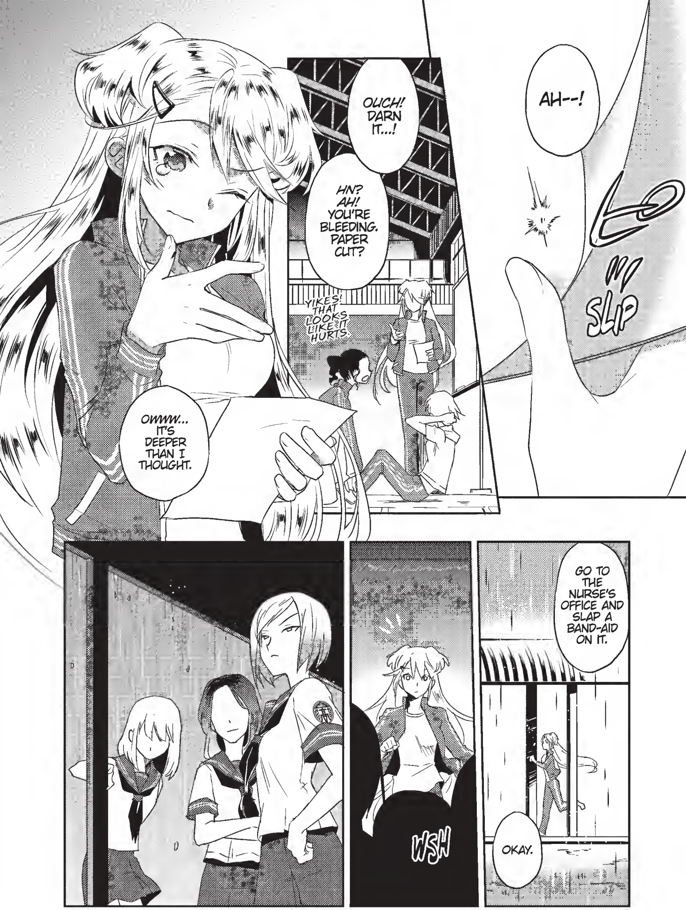

IF...
JUST "IF,' MIND YOU, THAT RUMOR IS TRUE, I WILL BE VERY, VERY UPSET.
I KNOW ALL TOO WELL...
HOW YOU'VE BEEN LOOKING AT HER.
I'VE GOT YOUR BACK, CAPTAIN.

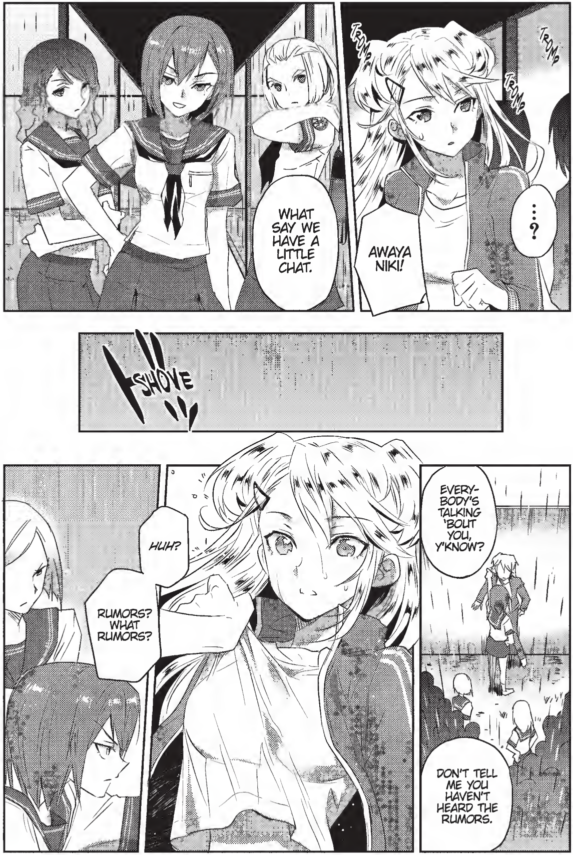

I'M PATHETIC.
EVEN WITH SUCH A TRUSTWORTHY FRIEND SUPPORTING ME...
I'M STILL LETTING THAT STUPID RUMOR GET TO ME.
I'M TOO AFRAID TO FIND OUT IF IT'S TRUE.
AH! CAPTAIN, YOU'LL RIP THE PAGE!
SNIFFLE...
AH.
I REMEMBER THIS COLUMN.
SMAK
THE ONLY REASON I EVEN WROTE IT...
WAS BECAUSE I FIGURED NO ONE WOULD READ IT.

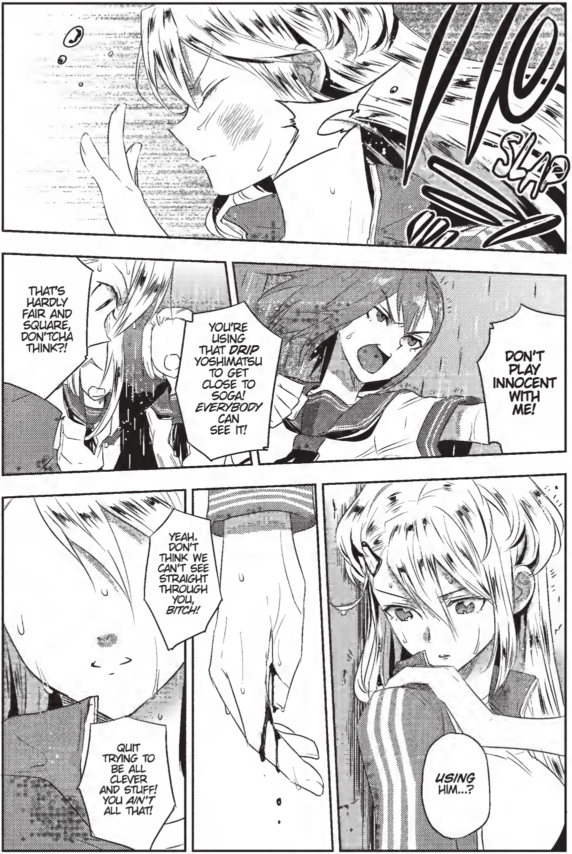
From "Star of the Giants"
Father teaches son a lesson

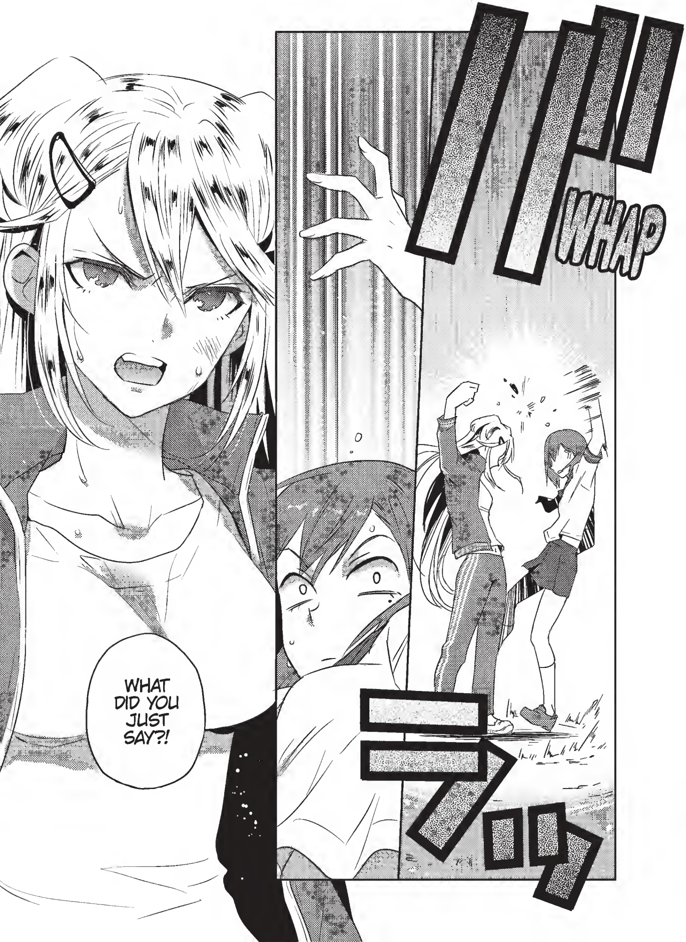

Father teaches son a lesson.
A Father-Figure Found in Manga
By Yoshimatsu Hotaka
BECAUSE I KNEW THAT...
I WAS ONLY TAKING THE OPPORTUNITY TO WRITE ABOUT MY OWN DAD.
In the end, before anyone knew what was happening, he d
He left behind him a wife lost in emotional turmoil—part so
part hatred—and a young, powerless son with a heart co
And that's how I lost the man I called "father" not once, b
For kids who've never lost anyone in their lives, understanding
what I went through would be very, very hard to do.
MORE THAN A DECADE HAS PASSED SINCE HIS DEATH.
ALL THOSE YEARS, I DID MY BEST TO BOTTLE UP MY GRIEF, SHOVING IT DOWN INSIDE, KEEPING IT FROM SHOWING.
I wan nd that someone.
BUT IN THAT ARTICLE I THOUGHT NOBODY READ, I FINALLY PUT THOSE EMOTIONS INTO WORDS AND SPIT THEM OUT ONTO THE PAPER.
I HAD TO. I FELT LIKE I'D EXPLODE IF I DIDN'T.
I WONDER IF AWAYA NIKI READ IT.
MAYBE SHE HASN'T.
MAYBE THE RUMOR IS TRUE AND SHE IS ONLY USING ME.
FWAP
NO. THAT DOESN'T MATTER.

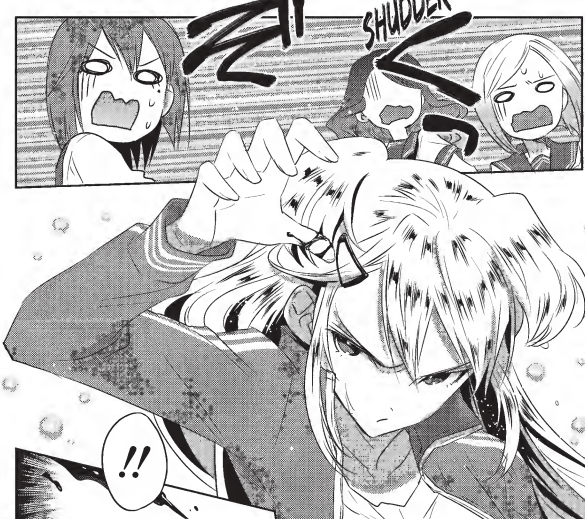

WHOOSH
I've learned how to vent my feelings with words, now, anyway.
TWITCH
STREEETCH
Okay.
Let's do this again!
I'll write another article.
I'll crystal-lize all my feelings into words.
And spit them out again in secret.
By doing that, I can keep on going without exploding.
City sports center Assemble there!
Baseball Soccer
On!
Workout in the gym.
Cross country Swimming
Everyone read this!
Be nice to the basketball club!!

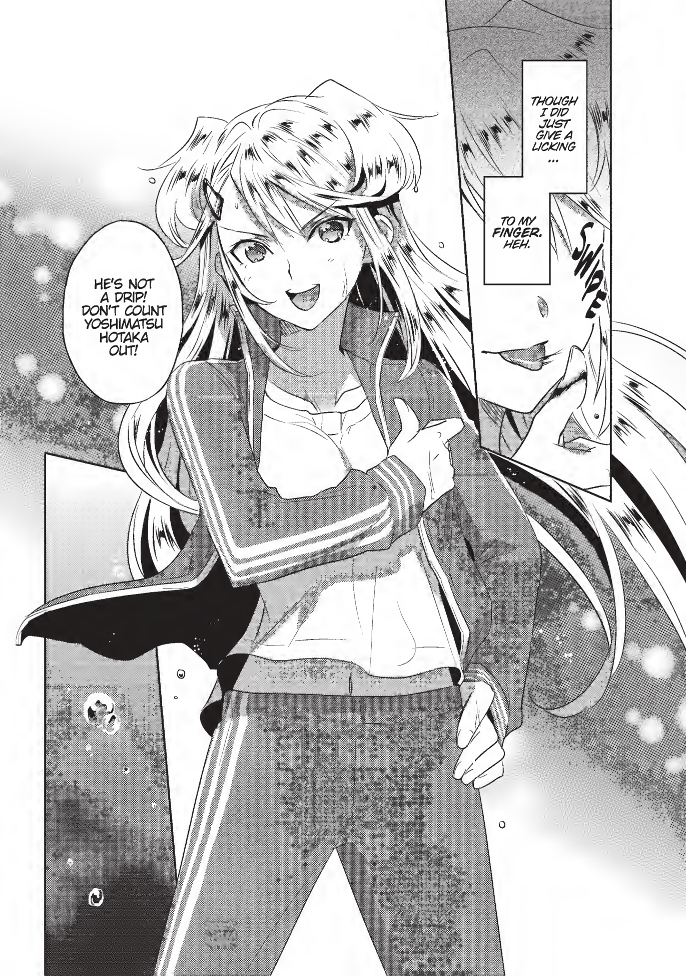

AH--!
SLIP
OUCH! DARN IT...!
HN? AH! YOU'RE BLEEDING. PAPER CUT?
YIKES! THAT LOOKS LIKE IT HURTS.
OWWW... IT'S DEEPER THAN I THOUGHT.
GO TO THE NURSE'S OFFICE AND SLAP A BAND-AID ON IT.
OKAY.
WSH

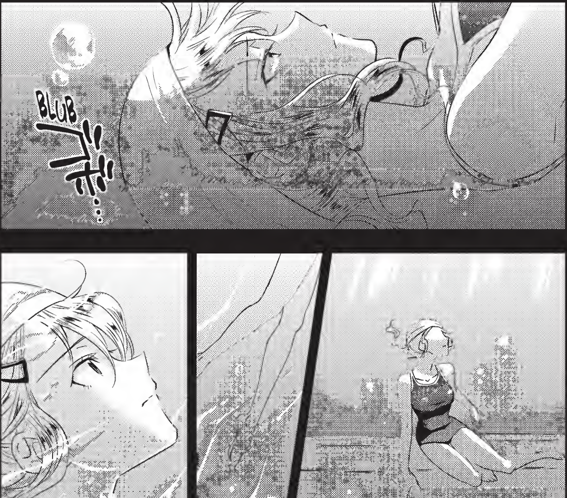

TROMP
TROMP
TROMP
...?
AWAYA NIKI!
WHAT SAY WE HAVE A LITTLE CHAT.
SHOVE
EVERYBODY'S TALKING 'BOUT YOU, Y'KNOW?
DON'T TELL ME YOU HAVEN'T HEARD THE RUMORS.
HUH?
RUMORS? WHAT RUMORS?

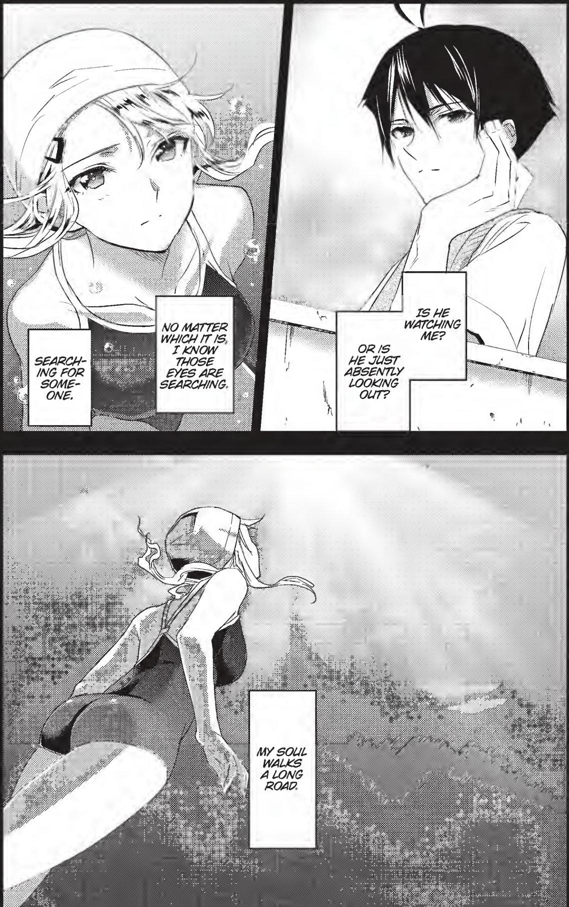

SLAP
DON'T PLAY INNOCENT WITH ME!
YOU'RE USING THAT *DRIP* YOSHIMATSU TO GET CLOSE TO SOGA! *EVERYBODY* CAN SEE IT!
THAT'S HARDLY FAIR AND SQUARE, DON'TCHA THINK?!
USING HIM...?
YEAH. DON'T THINK WE CAN'T SEE STRAIGHT THROUGH YOU, *BITCH!*
QUIT TRYING TO BE ALL CLEVER AND STUFF! YOU *AIN'T* ALL THAT!


WHAP
WHAT DID YOU JUST SAY?!


SHUDDER
!!
LICK
UM...
HE'S NOT LICKED YET!
UM...!


THOUGH I DID JUST GIVE A LICKING ...
TO MY FINGER. HEH.
SWIPE
HE'S NOT A DRIP! DON'T COUNT YOSHIMATSU HOTAKA OUT!


BLUB
ゴボ…


IS HE WATCHING ME?
OR IS HE JUST ABSENTLY LOOKING OUT?
NO MATTER WHICH IT IS, I KNOW THOSE EYES ARE SEARCHING.
SEARCHING FOR SOMEONE.
MY SOUL WALKS A LONG ROAD.

To be continued...

SEVEN SEAS ENTERTAINMENT PRESENTS

evergreen

VOLUME 1

story by **YUYUKO TAKEMIYA** / art by **AKIRA CASKABE**

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EVERGREEN VOL. 1
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Edited by ASCII MEDIA WORKS.
First published in Japan in 2012 by KADOKAWA CORPORATION, Tokyo.
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ISBN: 978-1-626921-50-4

Printed in Canada

First Printing: May 2015

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

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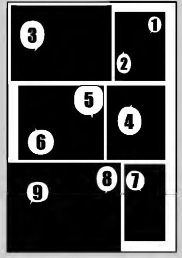
READING DIRECTIONS

This book reads from ***right to left***, Japanese style. If this is your first time reading manga, you start reading from the top right panel on each page and take it from there. If you get lost, just follow the numbered diagram here. It may seem backwards at first, but you'll get the hang of it! Have fun!!



JUST ADD WATER

Born with a congenital heart disease, and thus unable to join in activities that are too physical, Manga Club captain Yoshimatsu Hotaka can only watch through the club room's window whenever the school swim team practices. Hotaka is enamored with beautiful swimming ace, Awaya Niki. But Hotaka is sickly and shy, and feels that the best he can do is pine for her from afar.

When the gym teacher asks Hotaka to attend a special, after-school swim class to make up for not participating during regular classes, it sets into motion a budding friendship between Hotaka and Niki...and perhaps something more?

Rated: TEEN

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